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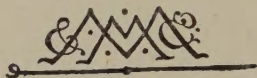
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CHRISTIAN FREEDOM



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CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

HULSEAN LECTURES, 1918-19

BY

FRANCIS E. HUTCHINSON

M.A., OXON. AND CANTAB.

FORMERLY CHAPLAIN OF KING'S COLLEGE, AND LECTURER OF
MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

marked

"Christ's Gospel . . . is a religion to serve God,
not in bondage of the figure or shadow, but in the
freedom of spirit."

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, 1549

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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IUVENTUTI NOSTRAE
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IN QUAM CHRISTUS NOS VINDICAVIT
D.D.

“I will not break the certain law of Charity for a doubtful Doctrine. . . . I dare not blaspheme free and noble spirits in religion, who search after truth with indifference and ingenuitie : lest in so doing I should degenerate into a spirit of persecution in the reality of the thing, though in another guise. . . . I do beleeeve that the destroying of this spirit out of the Church is a peece of the Reformation, which God in these times of changes aimes at.”

BENJAMIN WHICHCOTE,
Provost of King's College, 1644-59.

PREFACE

BENJAMIN JOWETT once remarked to his friends that they had spoken too much about freedom, and that their real concern was truth. Freedom is not an absolute good, as truth is ; yet it is the indispensable condition of reaching truth. From this aspect chiefly I have treated of freedom in these lectures, and, to emphasise the connection between freedom and truth, I have supplemented the lectures on freedom by a sermon on truth.

“ There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” The outlook for institutional Christianity is so grave, that the time we live in would seem to call for plain speaking, without overmuch regard for “ the tradition of the elders.” If at some points I appear to call in question the traditional teaching of the Christian Church, it is at those points where I honestly believe that that teaching does not

represent the mind of Christ. The Church exists to carry on the spirit of Christ to the new issues of each succeeding age, rather than to perpetuate its own past decisions. It is no disloyalty to the fundamental purpose of the Church, if its sons press for a reconsideration of those decisions, and ask whether the proportion and quality of the teaching of the Church are as faithful as they can be to the teaching of the Master. Many voices, some of them unfriendly, some friendly but anxious, are asking that question to-day. Of the latter class I give two instances. It was a coincidence, undesigned and therefore the more significant of the time, that, while these lectures were in course of delivery, two other voices, better known than mine, were putting to Cambridge hearers virtually the same question as I was putting.

Mr. G. G. Coulton, now Fellow of St. John's College, was giving to a general audience a set of eight lectures, which he has since published under the title *Christ, St. Francis and To-day*. It is part of his contention that the doctrine of the Trinity, like many other doctrines, remained an open question for the earliest

Christian centuries until it was officially closed by definitions of the Church in the creed-making age. But to-day, he says, "it is pre-eminently the exclusivist spirit within the church which is on its trial"; "the exclusive spirit in Christianity is falling more and more into open bankruptcy." He asks the authorities of the Church: "Are you assured of Christ's inspiration when you command us, on the very threshold of your church, to accept as certain the things that are yet unproved?" Even those who would controvert some of Mr. Coulton's inferences must recognise the fervour of his discipleship of Christ. *Ecce vere Christianus, in quo dolus non est.*

The other Cambridge voice is that of the Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy, who delivered three Lay Sermons (since published under the title *Reconstruction, and the Renewal of Life*), two of them in St. Edward's Church, and the third in King's College Chapel. In the last sermon, spoken as it happens on the same day that the last Hulsean lecture was delivered, Dr. Sorley maintains that the only atmosphere in which the quest for truth can live is freedom—"freedom of enquiry,

freedom of belief, freedom of teaching.” “If the theologian is in fetters from which the man of science and the philosopher are free,” the unity of spirit which should animate every branch of academic work is lost. Students of science and philosophy have complete freedom to revise the results of their predecessors’ work : “in thought as in life growth implies both selection and rejection.” Therefore he asks : “Is the thought of the Church to stand aloof from this law ? Is it to be bound for ever to the formulae devised by its leaders when philosophy was less complex, when science was in its infancy, and when modern historical methods were as yet undreamed of ? In this matter the Church of England is at the cross-roads.”

Such utterances as these of to-day are more insistent than the similar utterances of earlier days which are cited in this book, and the reason for that insistence is apparent. This generation sees men and women of Christian ideals and sympathies standing outside the Church, and consciously measuring the Church’s tests of membership by the standard which Christ required of those who would

follow him. Is there yet time, before the defection of Christians from the churches is greater than it is already, that we should, in Mr. Coulton's words, "all start afresh with a hearty desire to find the most that we can in Christ's personality and teaching, and to tolerate those who there find either less or more than we ourselves do" ?

Who shall decide the issue ? A grave responsibility rests upon the authorities of the Church. The bishops have commonly shewn themselves sympathetic towards the perplexities of sincere Christians, and are always more liberal than the ecclesiastical assemblies, where tradition is firmly entrenched. But the bishops can hardly be expected to face the determined opposition of the traditionalists, unless they have the articulate support of the generality of Christian people in England. "The really practical Oecumenical Council in these days of open literary debate," said Bishop Ridding, "is constituted ultimately, for theological no less than secular subjects, by the growth of general public opinion formed by full hearing of both sides." "A Church debarred from discussion

of serious questions adequately raised will have its convictions, however real, discredited as only obligations of tradition." If the suffrages were taken of all English men and women who still look to Christ for the inspiration of their lives, it will scarcely be questioned that they would desire the conditions of membership in Christ's Church to be no other and no narrower than Christ himself made them.

The sands are running out. The new reformation is already over-due. The vision of the Church that might be is seen by many outside the churches as well as within. But the signs of its coming are so little discernible, that there are those who fear that the truth of the vision may be recognised too late for the Christian Church to realise it, and they are tempted to exclaim with Luther—"We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed; let us forsake her." The truer loyalty to the Church of Christ is to "write the vision" in plain characters such as the passer-by may read and not mistake. The truer faith lies in steadfast endurance of the long delay: "though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not fail." And even though

it come too late for the generation of those who have grown weary because for all their pain they have "as it were brought forth wind," let them recognise in their increasing distress of mind "the beginning of travail" before the Son of Man come to his own; let them take to themselves George Tyrrell's self-effacing words: "Had I been Moses, I don't think I should have felt not entering the Land of Promise one bit, so long as I knew that Israel would do so one day."

This brief survey of a great question might have been indefinitely extended, but, apart from the limits imposed by the lectureship, I have thought it well to keep my book within modest dimensions, that it may not deter the general reader. In his interest also, full quotations have been given, partly because they are largely drawn from books which are out of print or are little read except by the professed student, partly because it was my purpose to shew that misgivings have been felt by representative Christians in almost every generation about the doctrinal

conditions of church membership being unduly stringent.

My heavy indebtedness to other writers has been acknowledged in the foot-notes. If anything remains unacknowledged, I ask indulgence on the score of my having had the misfortune to lose, on a journey from Cambridge after the delivery of the lectures, a collection of my materials which indicated sources and references. Any conscientious writer will realise what the loss meant. Although I have striven to make good that loss, I may have inadvertently failed to trace something which I owe to another and would fain have accredited to its "onlie begetter."

Certain obligations require special mention here. I had already set out on my self-chosen road, before I discovered that a better equipped traveller had gone this way. I refer to the Baird Lecture of 1913 by the Rev. Prof. W. M. Macgregor, D.D., Moderator of the United Free Church of Scotland. His thorough and sure-footed exploration of Pauline thought and Reformation theology I could not hope to equal; it is better that I should refer any of my readers, who have not already made

acquaintance with it, to his fascinating volume, that it may "fill up that which was lacking on my part." The philosophical aspect of the subject has been expounded, with an aptitude which is the native endowment of the Scot, by Dr. John Oman in his *Problem of Faith and Freedom*. The historical setting has recently received a comprehensive and illuminating survey in *Christianity and History*, written in collaboration by Dr. J. Vernon Bartlet and Dr. A. J. Carlyle. To many of the seventeenth century divines, discussed in the third lecture, I was first introduced many years ago by Principal John Tulloch's *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century*; and, although I have long since kept company with the original writers, I have not outgrown the need of Dr. Tulloch's guidance and his comments of large-hearted charity. I share the regret, which Canon Storr expressed in the preface to his *Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, that Dr. Tulloch's companion-volume, *Movements of Religious Thought in England in the Nineteenth Century*, has been long out of print.

There must be something more than chance in the fact that so many of my particular obligations are to Scotsmen. I have yet another to name. The second lecture especially owes not a little to the kind permission of Dr. J. Moffatt and his publishers, Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton, to make use of *A New Translation of the New Testament*; the modern idiomatic rendering gives point and freshness to many a well-worn Pauline phrase.

The writings of Mr. C. G. Montefiore have long been of service to me. It is as much to be desired that they should find readers among Christians as among Jews; for we have all much to gain from their fine temper and religious conviction.

I should add that no theological significance is intended in the disuse of capitals for the pronouns referring to divine names; it is only a recurrence to the sober standard of the English Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. Where, however, I cite the words of another writer, I retain the use which he has followed.

For many valuable suggestions and for assistance in proof-reading I am indebted to

the Rev. H. Balmforth, of Repton School. I value his generous help all the more, because at many vital points he would not be in full agreement with what I have written.

F. E. H.

LEYLAND,
December 6th, 1919.

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LECTURE I ·
CHRISTUS LIBERATOR

SYNOPSIS

THE war "to set the world free" has intensified our faith in the value of freedom. The cause of freedom is one: we cannot value political, and be indifferent to spiritual freedom.

The note of freedom in Christ's teaching, although little emphasised by the Church in our day, has been discerned by many who stood outside organised Christianity: *e.g.* by Shelley and Mazzini, who saw in Christ a liberator of humanity.

Jesus Christ was himself free, but he needed to effect his liberation, in a society which was conspicuously ruled by convention. His spiritual and intellectual freedom illustrated by his attitude towards (a) the Scriptures; (b) the Mosaic Law and its current interpretations, *e.g.* the Sabbath, fasting, clean and unclean meats; (c) the social and religious conventions, especially with regard to "sinners," heretics, and women.

He desired to train his followers in a like intelligent use of freedom; "the sons are free." He is no law-giver, and his words are not "official utterances." Always more authoritative than the recorded words is the spirit of Christ.

LECTURE I

CHRISTUS LIBERATOR

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. ST. JOHN viii. 36.

HISTORY, according to Lord Acton, is the record of man's struggle to become free. There are few of the dreams of the men of this age, the unfulfilment of which is more to be regretted than Acton's project of writing a History of Freedom. No task could do more honour to the spirit of man than that a worthy use might yet be made of the historian's library, which its donor described as "the material for a history of Liberty, the emancipation of Conscience from Power, and the gradual substitution of Freedom for Force in the government of men."¹ In the history

¹ Lord Morley, *Recollections*, i. p. 231. By the generous action of Mr. Carnegie Lord Acton's library passed into the hands of Lord Morley, who, in giving it to the Cambridge University Library, used the above words.

of that last clause a new chapter is, we trust, unrolling before our eyes. We look to-day, as Abraham Lincoln looked in his day, for "a new-birth of freedom" to result from the travail-pains of this new age. The noblest of all our aims, at this momentous hour¹ of human fate, is that the world of men may be set free from war and from oppression and servitude of every kind, so that all the nations, including those with whom we have been at strife, may in freedom develop their own personality, and make their peculiar contribution to the common good of humanity. We have proved in limitless sacrifice our love of freedom and our faith in freedom; we have staked everything upon that faith. The price of freedom is high, and the risks are great; but the best and wisest of our race have known it worth while to pay the price and to run the risks. "Freedom is one of those gains in human life, upon which we can never willingly go back."

It may be difficult to define freedom except negatively, but that is a defect it shares with many other things which men prize

¹This lecture was delivered on the Sunday following the declaration of the Armistice, when hopes were high.

supremely. But if its definition is negative,¹ its connotation is richly positive, as poets and prophets and leaders of the people have never failed to make clear. Every good thing in human life is dependent, at least for its perfection, on freedom. It is the condition of the highest morality, of spiritual religion, and of all great creative art ; it is the prime condition of the search for truth. The cause of freedom is one ; political, social, intellectual, religious freedom—who cares for one must come to value the others. We cannot prize our national freedom and be long indifferent to spiritual freedom ; we cannot be content with freedom for part only of our life, for all life is inter-related. It may even be urged that the surest foundation of freedom is the essentially religious doctrine of personality.² “Freedom,” wrote Dr. Figgis, “is the noblest of all the watchwords that appeal to man, because in the last resort it always means that man is a spiritual being.”³ It rests upon “the principle that man is a responsible moral

¹ Cp. H. Sidgwick, *Elements of Politics*, chap. iv.

² Cp. E. F. B. Fell, *Personal Liberty*, chap. ii.

³ *Churches in the Modern State*, p. 52.

agent, whose highest perfection is not obedience to an outward law, but fidelity to an inward spirit.”¹ The bondage of the mind is worse than all outward fetters: the slave Epictetus can “in his soul be free,” and his are thoughts which “no bondage can restrain.”

Since, then, this faith in freedom inspires so much of what is best in the life of our day, it becomes a question of increasing urgency: Does the religion of Christ give the promise of freedom, does it believe in freedom as the condition of vigorous moral life and of spiritual growth and of attaining truth? If the answer is hesitating, its advocates will speak to deaf ears; they must not expect to get a hearing from many who would be the best followers of Christ, young men and women of ardent spirit, preparing their minds to face the great issues of our time with courage and freshness and a new detachment from traditional opinion, and desiring fellowship in the quest of right living and right thinking. If organised Christianity speaks faintly and almost disparagingly of freedom, and says more of its dangers than

¹ R. E. Bartlett, *The Letter and the Spirit*, Bampton Lectures, p. 14.

of its values ; if its action reveals its attitude yet more clearly than its words,—if with the lips it commends the search for truth and at the same time prescribes the conclusions which must be reached ; if its intellectual interest is commonly diverted to lesser issues, its moral thinking timid and conventional, and its sympathy restricted, it will be increasingly left to “ the intellectual and moral minors of the race.” ¹

Already many generous and adventurous spirits have turned from the churches, to their loss and hardly less to ours, for we without them cannot be perfected. Some of them will have taken the churches' word as to what Christ's teaching was, without seeking for themselves, and so have missed the authentic note of freedom in his teaching. But there have happily always been others who, when the churches misrepresented the real Christ and the Father whom he revealed, have sought for themselves, and have found true lineaments which the churches had overlooked. Thus, in the maturer years which followed his first

¹ R. H. Charles, *Religious Development between the Old and the New Testaments*, p. 164.

instinctive revolt from the Christian teaching of his day, Shelley saw in Christ "a Promethean conqueror," come to liberate mankind from oppression and cruelty, from fear and superstition, from unworthy conceptions of God and man, one who broke the chain of custom and ignored the artificial distinctions among men, and pronounced his blessing on those who preserve "internal sanctity of soul." Shelley had not found all that Christ is and has been to men—and no man in isolation can find all—but he came at many vital points nearer to the historic Christ than did the contemporary preachers in Christ's name.¹ In very similar fashion was Christ conceived by Giuseppe Mazzini, who saw in him "the soul most full of love, most virtuous and holy, most inspired by God and the future, that men have ever hailed on this earth," a liberator of mankind from sin and error, who "bent over a decaying world, and murmured in its ear a word of faith," which brought new life and made the world a world of liberty and equa-

¹ See his unfinished *Essay on Christianity*, and also Stopford Brooke's posthumous article, *Shelley's Interpretation of Christ and his Teaching*, Hibbert Journal, April, 1918.

lity.¹ Though that is not the whole truth, it is a very noble and essential part of it, and a part which has not been prominent in Christian teaching.

If, then, my theme is not exhaustive, it has a place, and, so far as it goes, and I allow that it does not go the whole way, it is positive and needed. The claim of Jesus Christ on our allegiance to-day is strengthened if we can justly acclaim him as the truest liberator that humanity has ever had from all its ills: from moral evil (of which, although that is the greatest deliverance, I need to say little, because the Christian Church has been faithful in emphasising that aspect at least); from intellectual error—superstition and fear (worst of human sufferings, for “fear hath punishment”), from dread of unfamiliar truth and bondage to tradition; from social error—unbrotherliness, exclusiveness, and all barriers to the instincts of natural kindliness; and from ecclesiastical error—legalism and literalism, and from every tendency to value the form above the spirit, a correct creed above a

¹ See especially *Faith and the Future*, and *From the Pope to the Council*.

loyal discipleship. "For freedom did Christ set us free" (Gal. v. 1), but Christians have seldom dared to use the freedom which he offered. Yet he led the way into the glorious freedom of the children of God, and he intended that his followers should win the freedom of sonship. "That which Christ has done, Humanity can do."¹ If the spirit of Christ is our guide in the problems of life and thought, with the experience of the past to counsel rather than to constrain us, we shall set our faces towards the future with expectant eyes; for, as Bishop Westcott said at the end of his long life of interpreting the Christian faith to his generation, we may thank God that he has called us who speak in Christ's name "to unfold a growing message, and not to rehearse a stereotyped tradition."

Jesus Christ was himself free. His freedom would have been more emphasised in common Christian teaching, if it had not been taken for granted as the inevitable consequence of his divine sonship; as something inherited, not acquired. His moral freedom has not

¹ Mazzini, *Faith and the Future* (*ad fin.*).

been seen for the wonder that it was, because, under a theological presupposition, readers have overlooked his struggle for that freedom ; they have even regarded the result of his temptations as a foregone conclusion, and so have robbed them of human interest and human value. Indeed, at any rate until the recent past, preachers have shewn themselves anxious to dispel the notion that Christ's struggle with temptation was like ours, or that its value to us was by way of encouragement. They made him unlike " the true way-faring Christian " who must win his moral freedom, " not without dust and heat," in the race " where that immortal garland is to be run for." Christian thinking might better have followed the lead of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who described one who was " tempted in every respect like ourselves " ; only after agonizing prayer and difficult self-conquest had he submitted his will to the divine will. " Thus, Son though he was, he learned by all he suffered how to obey." ¹

¹ Heb. iv. 15, v. 7, 8, in Dr. Moffatt's *New Translation of the New Testament*.

Or again, if Jesus shews himself free from the superstitions and defects of the older religion, and has a purer conception of God, it is popularly assumed, not without clerical encouragement, that this was a knowledge that he brought with him into the world, rather than that he needed to emancipate himself from what was inadequate or unworthy in the faith which he had learned as a dutiful child in a Jewish home. The wonder of that emancipation is lost, if it was prematurely given him from the outset, and not achieved as he "grew in wisdom" and reflected with ever-deepening insight upon what he had as a child unquestioningly received.

Or yet again, if he used a surprising freedom with regard to existing religious institutions, like the sabbath, some would explain that freedom as belonging to his prerogative; by right of being Son of Man he can dispense himself or his followers. According to this view his disciples take him for the authority instead of the scribes; they are not encouraged to exercise a freedom such as he used, but to accept a new ruling from "the lord of the sabbath." This interpretation, however, is

unlike the method of Christ, and seems to rob of their full meaning the great emancipating words which precede: "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." If the sentence about the lord of the sabbath is not an unintelligent gloss of the evangelist, it must be interpreted so as to bear out the preceding words: if the words are Christ's own, it is not himself only who is alluded to as son of man, but Everyman; the sabbath was made for man's sake, and it is for man to interpret the sabbath law according to his needs, as Jesus did himself.

The static view of Christ's freedom as belonging to him from earliest years is already abandoned by many Christian teachers, but it lingers, consciously or unconsciously, implied or conveyed, in much that is taught about him. If there was no struggle for freedom, and no growth in freedom, his experience was not genuinely human and has no convincing reality; and, as a recent writer has boldly said, "There is only one fatal heresy about Christ, namely the heresy called Docetic; which robs him of all reality."¹ "Sirs, we

¹ A. Clutton Brock, *Studies in Christianity*, p. 72.

would see Jesus " is the characteristic demand of many in our day who desire to take Christ for master of their lives ; and the Synoptic Gospels give us, if not all that we wish for, yet enough to make us sure that he was subject to real human conditions of knowledge and environment, and needed therefore to effect his liberation from the ways and thinking of the world in which he found himself placed. He was able to lead others into freedom, not because he was born superhumanly free from the common necessity of clearing himself from current conceptions, but just because he needed to work through the teaching which he had received to purer and freer thought. He could lead men " by a fresh and living way " to the Father, because he first tested further than any other had done the truth of the great paradox, that the service of God alone is perfect freedom. The wholehearted response of his free spirit to the divine Spirit gave him a conscious independence of the traditions of men.

Jesus Christ grew up in a society which attached uncommon value to the traditions of men, and which minutely regulated the

details of social life by inherited religious custom and sanction ; its religion leant much on the careful observance of external duties. In such a society the frown of the godly was quickly brought upon any who shewed carelessness or indifference in complying with this formal life. The sanction of these forms seemed to be placed beyond question, for it was no less than the written Word of God, scrupulously interpreted by contemporary teachers with authority. Into this world of ideas Jesus was born, and could not but begin by sharing those ideas until he rose above them, or saw them in truer perspective. It is, then, with an " added sense of reality and pathos " ¹ that we see Jesus himself subject to the imperfect mental environment of his time and race and national religion. He must have begun by sharing the common thoughts of the devout people—their belief in the Sacred Scriptures, and above all in the Law of Moses, the divine favour towards the Chosen People, the Judgment Day and the rewards of heaven and hell, the power of Satan, the possession of men's bodies and souls by demons,

¹ F. Seeborn, *The Spirit of Christianity*, p. 116.

the Messianic dreams and Apocalyptic hopes. Many, if not all, of these popular beliefs he retained seemingly¹ to the end, yet they are not the distinctive features of his teaching; even though he made them the framework of his deeper thought, his moral insight and spiritual understanding made him immune from their ill effects, so that his teaching can become ultimately, if not for his own generation, "independent of all those mortal parts of its environment."² The spirit of Christ is destined to dissipate those very errors and contemporary limitations which were the necessary setting of a teaching delivered at a given time and place. The authentic utterance of a great teacher in any age is not discovered in what was "common form" in his age, but in what his contemporaries recognised as new and challenging. Thus we shall not look for the characteristic thought of Jesus in the borrowed language and ideas, the

¹ That is, he continued to use the popular language about these beliefs, and yet they may have come to bear a different and a deeper meaning for him than they had borne when he first adopted them in their popular sense. In particular, he had changed the content of the beliefs about the Messianic kingdom.

² Seebohm, *op. cit.* p. 116.

counters of all religious phraseology among the Jews of his day, but in what arrested the attention of his hearers as differing from the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. He seldom directly challenges the inherited faith, but he transforms it by change of emphasis. Silently he passes over what was obsolete and sinister in the old conception of God, and replaces it by his dominant conception of the heavenly Father. Without any set formal teaching about God, there grows up from many a parable and many incidental sayings a notion of God, which inspires confidence rather than fear. Jesus can bid men trust God utterly, because he is such an one as they can trust and approach as "our Father"; the chosen name of Father was of itself a liberation from the terrors of Sinai.

The freedom of Christ is well illustrated in his use of the Scriptures. They were to him, as to any other devout Jew, profoundly sacred, and no doubt he shared the common acceptance of them as historically true, where they had the form of history. He formulated no new theory of them or of their interpretation. He used them for his own profit; they

nourished his inner life, to their words he turned in temptation and affliction, with their words on his lips he died. Through them he interpreted to himself his mission ; the portrait of the Suffering Servant was more to him than a stray saying of Zechariah about a king riding upon an ass. It is "Matthew," not Jesus, who appeals to that sort of detailed prophecy to authenticate his Messianic claim.¹ From the rejection of the prophets that went before him, Christ reads his own destiny : the Son of Man goes the way foreshewn. But while he gets to the heart of the great scriptures, and seizes their spirit in a way of his own, he possessed a higher revelation within himself which allowed him to judge of what was written by that higher standard, and even explicitly to supersede it : "It was said to them of old time, but I say unto you." These are not the words of a literalist but of a free spirit.² He looks to the scriptures, not for

¹ It is "Matthew," too, who discovers the fanciful relation of Hosea's words to the flight into Egypt.

² Cp. A. Sabatier, *The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*, p. 167. "The traditional doctrine did not fetter the consciousness of Jesus. By virtue of the immediate intuition of his consciousness, in which he found the certitude and the light of a higher revelation, he did not hesitate to put aside the letter

a law, but for life : "in them ye have life." So far as we can judge from his citations of scripture in the Gospels, he made the same kind of discrimination as simple devout folk have always made : he drew sustenance for the life of his soul from the Psalms and the Prophets, and from Deuteronomy with its "heart-religion." Those parts of the Bible where there are the least marks of time, and where the eternal truths of religion shine most brightly, were his chosen ground, as they are still ours to-day. Because he gets down below the superficial meaning to the underlying principle, his citations are often surprising, as, for example, in his use of the words in the passage "concerning the Bush" (Mark xii. 26). He complains that others do not understand : "Is not this where you go wrong ? ", he says (Mark xii. 24), "you do not understand the scriptures."

From the Prophets especially he draws the great liberating words, which the men of his day had not yet assimilated. From the Book of Isaiah he announces his first message in

of the law, whether as relative and transitory or as contrary to his own moral and religious inspiration."

his native village, and it is a message of freedom, promising release to those who are in bondage. There may also be significance in the fact that, as St. Luke gives the citation, it breaks the verse at the point where the old prophet proclaims "the day of vengeance of our God," as if it were no part of Christ's Good News to proclaim a God of vengeance. Also, if the evangelist reports correctly, or even if he confuses two different citations of Jesus from Isaiah, Jesus quotes a clause from a verse in another chapter, that verse being in the very spirit of his teaching about the externals of religion: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"¹ And again, from a neighbouring chapter, at his last coming to Jerusalem, Jesus draws the universalist hope: "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?"² Twice he quotes the words of Hosea, "I will

¹ Isai. lviii. 6. The penultimate clause only is quoted in Luke iv. 18.

² Isai. lvi. 7, *cit. ap.* Mark xi. 17.

have mercy, and not sacrifice," but no longer in reference to the Temple worship, which was by now hardly the real centre of Jewish religion, but in reference to other external duties of religion, sabbath observance and ceremonial defilement, which afforded the greater danger of formalism in Christ's day.¹

Jesus Christ is in the true succession of the prophets, and, while he goes beyond them and is more than prophet, he could substantiate his claim that he came, not to destroy, but to "fulfil the Prophets." But is it as easy to establish the claim that he came to "fulfil the Law"? Here was the point of sharpest antagonism with his opponents. Here, in the Jew's opinion, was the heart of the matter. For, within the ample scriptures of the Jewish religion, the Books of Moses had a central place: the Jew's fidelity to the Law was the touchstone of his orthodoxy. The Law had for some centuries been regarded as final and unalterable: all that was left to do was to interpret or re-interpret the Law.² Re-inter-

Christ and Law

¹ Matt. ix. 13, and xii. 7. Cp. Hort, *Judaistic Christianity*, pp. 30-32.

² Cp. Charles, *op. cit.*, chap. vi.

pretation was not originated by Jesus : others before his day and in his day used it ; there was no other way in which new truth or development of old truth could find place within the Jewish faith. The finality of the Law might seem to rule out all possibility of religious growth ; it did in fact impede it, and yet not wholly prevent it. The apocalyptic writers allowed themselves considerable freedom in interpreting the Law of Moses ; for instance, their teaching about the Messianic Kingdom and the future life had come in under cover of ancient scriptures which plainly did not contemplate such developments. When Jesus extracted from the Pentateuchal words about "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" the faith that he is a God of personal relationships which he will not suffer to perish, he was perhaps not using more freedom than many teachers of the Law had used before him. The Pharisaic teachers, too, had long since accepted the belief in immortality, and found warrant for it in passages of scripture where that belief is not naturally found. The letter of the Law was strained by many Jewish thinkers in the

interest of a higher doctrine or of a purer morality. There was life still in the religion of the Law, even a very noble life, as the 119th Psalm abundantly shews, and, since life means growth, that growth took place in spite of the fixity of the Law. Was this method of expansion sufficient for the purpose of Jesus Christ? Could he accept the existing status of the Law, and work out his Gospel within it? or would his new wine burst the old bottles?

The attitude of Jesus to the Law is not to be defined in a sentence. If an expositor of his teaching thinks to define Christ's relation to the Law as summed up in the saying, attributed to him in St. Matthew's Gospel, that he came "not to destroy, but to fulfil the Law," or if another expositor roundly asserts that Christ abrogated the Law, either leaves much unsaid, much unexplained. Nor is it more helpful to suggest that he abrogated the ceremonial law, but re-affirmed and emphasised the moral law. For he tended to conform to the ceremonial law, where it was beneficial or even harmless; he attended the Temple, paid the Temple dues, and bid

the leper "Go, shew thyself unto the priest, as Moses commanded." It was the moral law for which he cared most deeply, but for that very reason he reserved for it his most trenchant criticism ; not even the very arcanum of the Law, the Decalogue itself, escaped his analysis of its insufficiency, on account of its negative and external character. His own mind he reveals in the positive law or inclusive principle of love ; when he enunciates the Golden Rule, he declares "*This* is the law and the prophets."

With current interpretations of the Law by the professional teachers of his day Christ clearly broke, and—layman though he was—he defended his freedom of action and his breaches of common usage. His controversies with the Pharisees, which St. Matthew's Gospel may have exaggerated owing to the writer's hostility to the Jews, reveal the acuteness of the difference. There is no more authentic trait in Christ's ministry than his disregard of established usage in respect to the sabbatical law. From the beginning of his public life it drew hostile comment, and brought him a reputation for his free action. His opponents

were given a handle against him, and were on the watch for fresh charges of so damaging a kind. The conflict led to something like exasperation on both sides ; it is recorded of him, who was usually so self-possessed, that he shewed " anger and vexation at their obstinacy," while the Pharisees were " filled with fury." ¹ The fourth Gospel bears out the Synoptic account with fresh instances of what was regarded as sabbath-breaking, and represents it as a practice which led to his persecution. " This," says the evangelist, " was why the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did things like this on the sabbath." His sabbath-breaking was enough of itself to condemn him out of hand : " This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath. . . . He is only a sinner." ² No public action of his could have been more deliberate or more calculated to force on a conflict with the upholders of tradition. Yet he justified his action once and again : sometimes on grounds of simple humanity or obvious common-sense, which must over-ride all external law, some-

¹ Mark iii. 5, and Luke vi. 11 (Moffatt).

² John v. 16, ix. 16, 24 (Moffatt).

times by citing scriptural precedent for disregard of the ceremonial law in case of need, but most comprehensively by the emphatic emancipating word : " The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." His repeated actions and this sweeping dictum alike go far beyond the liberty of interpretation which any contemporary had dared to use. The axiom is so far-reaching that, at a stroke, it releases all who follow Christ from unqualified subservience to any external ordinances of religion whatsoever. Not the sabbath only, but fasting also, the sacraments and all forms of church order, should, according to this large principle, be judged by their serviceableness to man's need. It may be legitimate to urge that " man " is more than the individual, that the individual has a social duty to the Christian community, and that the community has need of an external ordering of its religious life. But the community at least is free to adopt, modify or discard all forms according to the test of their usefulness for sustaining the spiritual life.

This was clearly Christ's mind with regard to fasting. His disciples' abstinence from the

formal and stated fasts drew immediate attention, like the sabbath-breaking, at the beginning of the ministry: "Why do John's disciples fast, and yours not?" Our Lord's answer implies that fasting as a natural expression of sincere feeling will always have a place, but that as a formal ordinance it no longer exists.¹ He does indeed take it for granted that his disciples will fast, but characteristically he lays down no rules about stated times, and only insists that they shall not be seen of men to fast. His own life, so far as it was "seen of men," was so little ascetic, that it was contrasted with that of the austere Baptist; indeed in this respect, as in that of the sabbath, he gave occasion for scandal and was reputed "a glutton and a wine-bibber." It affords yet another illustration of his freedom from the conventional life of a holy man, and of the wholesome natural outlook of one who mingled sociably and easily with his fellow-men.

The same clear-sighted sanity distinguishes his treatment of the question of clean and unclean meats: another liberating word—

¹ Cp. J. Drummond, *Via, Veritas, Vita*, p. 264.

“whatsoever from without goeth into the man cannot defile him”—implies a wholesale reversal of traditional opinion and custom. “Thus cleansing all meats” is St. Mark’s summary of its wide-reaching effect. “By the enunciation of a single principle of His own, . . . Jesus branded great sections of the Mosaic law with unimportance—all that had to do with ritual uncleanness and purification.”¹ When a religious custom, whatever it is, has become a tyranny, a formality which threatens to get more attention than the doing of God’s will, it is best broken, or the form will count for more than the spirit. At the sight of such formalism, Jesus is again stirred to indignation, and, as so often, resorts to the prophetic scriptures: “Isaiah made a grand prophecy about you hypocrites. . . . *This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me: vain is their worship of me, for the doctrines they teach are but human precepts.* You drop what God commands, and hold to human tradition.”² Similarly he rejects the plea of Corban as an excuse for

¹ C. A. Anderson Scott, in *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, p. 347.

² Mark vii. 6-8 (Moffatt).

evading natural obligations to parents. We need not suppose that Rabbis were commonly so unspiritual as to excuse a man from supporting his dependents because he had promised money to religious purposes ; it is enough to suppose that some such instance of perverse interpretation had come before our Lord's notice, and indeed it would not be hard to find parallels in Christian life. The general character of these decisions of our Lord about religious observances is unmistakable ; his appeal is not to authority, not to the original terms of the Law, but to the awakened conscience, the open mind, the clear vision which distinguishes means from ends, and which seeks to obey the spirit without being tied to the letter.¹

While the Master was still with his disciples, there was no encouragement from him of the spirit which makes for exclusiveness and intolerance in an organised society. He was himself notably free from the characteristic

¹ Cp. E. Caird, *Lay Sermons*, p. 162. Christ "presents His commands, not as a substitute for what was said by them of old time, but simply as deepening, widening, reinterpreting the old letter till the spirit that was half concealed in it becomes wholly revealed."

defects of respectable people in the restriction of their sympathies. Nothing surprised his opponents and followers alike more than the unrestricted freedom of his intercourse with all sorts and conditions of men and women. This trait also is evident from the outset of his ministry, when he summoned Levi as he actually sat at the receipt of custom ; and he was soon seated at Levi's table, where " many tax-gatherers and sinners " were invited to meet him. Upon the Pharisees' remonstrance he announces as a guiding principle of his mission : " I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." The " sinners " were probably not " sinners above all others," but those who were regarded by the religious as sinners because they failed to observe scrupulously the ceremonial law. Were they many or few ? and were the Pharisee teachers generally helpful to the masses or not ? It is not necessary to decide this disputed point, and perhaps the contemporary evidence is insufficient for a decision. There was probably then as now a considerable proportion of the population, among the prosperous as well as among the poor, who were unhelped by the

ministrations of the professional religious teachers; and the remembrance of our own failure to reach the many will soften our judgment of the Jewish Church. But at any rate Jesus succeeded just where the Rabbis and scribes failed or perhaps were not even trying for success. Instead of leaving severely to themselves these disinherited ones, as the Rabbis were tempted to do, Jesus approached them with evident sympathy and natural feeling. He was so unlike their notion of a religious teacher, so approachable and patient with their failures, that he broke down their shyness, and they "heard him gladly." Quickly he earned the repute of being "a friend of publicans and sinners." Here was one who held himself too good for no man's company, who counted no man or woman outside the pale of his sympathy or unentitled to his courtesy. He was not disconcerted at being found talking with those whom decent people avoided as a matter of conscience. Even if, on the occasion of his interview with the Syro-Phoenician woman, there lingered in him a trace of the natural Jewish feeling, it was not proof against the sheer sincerity

and human need of the woman, and he took her reproof in good part, rather with delighted acceptance.

Jesus was ready himself to be "servant of all," before he put it to his followers as the only worthy ambition: "this touch of eager personal service, especially towards the sinner and the outcast, was a special characteristic of the religion of Jesus, and a new thing when he preached it."¹ Thus the spiritually unhappy, the morally discredited, the socially outcast, were not afraid to come to him and unburden themselves, and to them he spoke the liberating words of forgiveness and hope. As he moved freely and forgave freely, he created a new outlook upon life for those who had fallen outside the religious life of their countrymen. There seems to be no trace of any doctrine of total depravity in his words or acts; he despaired of none, unless it were the self-satisfied; he appealed to the elemental good qualities in

¹ Montefiore, *Synoptic Gospels*, i. 225. Also the same writer's *Liberal Judaism and Hellenism*, pp. 67 and 107. It should in fairness be added that Mr. Montefiore maintains, that the sympathy of Jesus was deficient towards the Pharisees, and that he was on this account unable to help them.

every man—even bad men, he observes, are generally kind to their children,—he found “faith” where other religious men were not even looking for it, he restored self-respect where it seemed gone for ever. All human distress, whether of body or of mind, was a sure passport to his sympathy, and no barriers of race or religion, class or reputation, could shut it out; the Samaritan heretic, the unpatriotic tax-gatherer, the woman that was a sinner in the city—among such as these he freely moved, and brought a willing ear and an understanding heart.

In no other relation of social life does Jesus shew himself freer from the tradition of his race and its religion than in his attitude towards women.] As Mr. Claude Montefiore has generously allowed: “The religious position of woman and the law of divorce form the least attractive feature in the Rabbinical system. . . . The unerring ethical instinct of Jesus led him to put his finger upon the weak spots and sore places of the established religion. Of all such weak spots and sore places this was the weakest and the sorest.”¹

Christus Liberatus
Woman's Lib.

¹ Montefiore, *op. cit.* i. 235.

The Jew was still an Oriental in his view of woman: even if he was often superior to his theory, and had the memories of great and noble women in his national history, yet the woman in the days of Christ had small protection at law or in religious sanction. She was, in religion and law, palpably an inferior, and especially was this true in the matter of divorce,¹ where the husband had dangerously large rights, while the woman had almost no redress. When Jesus was questioned on the point, his answer reveals an equal regard for the woman and the man. If the ideal which he upheld of unlimited fidelity to the marriage covenant was too high for common life, or for the basis of civil legislation, yet it was an ideal of equality; he gave no sanction to the masculine plea for a double standard. In this matter he went in the teeth of the Deuteronomic code, as well as of existing practice, and he excused the Mosaic law, rather than justified it, by saying (perhaps without historic warrant) that the provision had been made "for the hardness of your hearts."

¹ The subject is learnedly discussed by I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, ch. ix.

It was the same spirit of generous defence of the oppressed and weaker sex that moved our Lord to protect with rare courtesy the frail woman "caught in the very act," whom the virtuous singled out for shame, while the male offender apparently escaped publicity. While he thus befriended the most unhappy and degraded of their sex, his relations with other women were on natural and human terms. He conversed with women, in the sight of others, so that his own disciples " marvelled that he talked with a woman," or in private, as when Mary of Bethany " sat at the Lord's feet and heard his word " (Luke x. 39), and to women he opened out some of his deepest teaching.¹ His parables, especially those recorded by St. Luke but not only those, deal almost as often with the simple cares of woman's life as with man's, and of a woman's gracious act he made bold to say that it would be told for a memorial of her wherever his gospel should spread. Women attached themselves to his company, and ministered to his needs. He numbered among

¹ Cp. E. Grubb, *Authority and the Inward Light*, p. 108. See also T. B. Allworthy, *Women in the Apostolic Church*, pp. 1-26.

his disciples, as no Rabbi would have done, many women, from some of whom, it is recorded, devils had been cast out. Women-disciples accompanied him as he went from city to city, and as he went on the fatal journey to the Holy City, though no obligation lay upon them to attend the Passover. They were faithful to him when the Twelve forsook him and fled. The foundation of this "highly original" bearing towards women was his faith in the equal value of each individual soul, regardless of sex or class or condition. The personality of woman was as sacred to him as that of man. St. Paul, who in general entered so deeply into his Master's mind, here fell behind him, and never wholly emancipated himself from the ingrained habit of mind of his race, but at least he summed up aright when he asserted that "in Christ there can be neither male nor female." If the apostle was not always as good as his word, it was the actions of his Master as much as his words which took men by surprise. In the long-drawn history of the liberation of women from servitude and inferiority there is none who has better right to be remembered as a champion

of womanhood than the Son of Mary, and his doctrine and practice have not yet been fully assimilated or realised by the Church of Christ.

Jesus Christ was himself free to follow the leadings of the Spirit, untrammelled by the traditions of men, the first to enter fully into "the glorious liberty of the children of God." But he did not claim it as a personal prerogative. He tells his followers that it is for them too to realise their sonship to the heavenly Father (Matt. v. 45); and "the sons are free" (Matt. xvii. 26). "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John viii. 32). For nothing is so liberating as truth: sincerity of heart makes us know ourselves as we are, unfree so long as we are "the bond-servants of sin," only free when we have found our dependence on God. Moral freedom is the first and greatest element of the freedom for which Christ set us free. But truth of the mind also sets us free: it enables us to see things as they are, in their true proportion and in relation to their purpose, and so to distinguish means from ends, and to be under no servitude to any means. Our Lord

would have his disciples know what they were doing, in using or forbearing to use the inherited traditions of men. In the spirit of the historic Christ is the saying attributed to him in an ancient codex of St. Luke's Gospel: "Seeing some one working on the sabbath, he said, Man, if thou knowest what thou dost, blessed art thou." Jesus treated his disciples as "friends" (John xv. 14, 15), and would make them sharers of his thought, guided by his spirit, not subject to orders and rules. He respected their separate personalities, and gave them principles instead of rules. The true *Imitatio Christi* is no mechanical following, but a living of their own lives in his spirit. "As the Way, He is meant to transform us: but the transformation is not into the fashion of Jesus of Nazareth, but into a fashion shaped out of our own materials."¹ Jesus Christ is no law-giver, no second Moses. No founder of a religious movement has ever laid down fewer regulations for the future; Christ gave no new Decalogue, but only the twin principles of love to God and man, on which, he declares,

¹ F. J. A. Hort, *The Way the Truth the Life*, Hulsean Lectures, p. 205.

“hang all the law and the prophets.” He left no code, no written word, no official class. The choice and training of twelve companions is the minimum of organisation, if that word even is not too big for the fact. His followers were left free to create and modify the forms of their common life, as the Spirit should guide them, when and as the need arose. The main subject of his teaching, the Kingdom of God, eludes both precise definition and material organisation. Its charter is “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”¹

¹ Matt. xviii. 20. Cp. A. M. Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, pp. 515-9, on “Christ and the idea of the Church.” Compare also what John Locke says in answer to those who insisted on the strict doctrine of apostolical succession: “Let them shew me the edict by which Christ has imposed that law upon his church. And let not any man think me impertinent, if, in a thing of this consequence, I require that the terms of that edict be very express and positive. For the promise he has made us, that wheresoever two or three are gathered, etc., seems to imply the contrary. Whether such an assembly want anything necessary to a true church, pray do you consider” (*First Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 14). William Law remarks: “It is very observable, that there is not one command in all the Gospel for public worship.” The frequent attendance at it is never so much as mentioned in all the New Testament. Whereas that religion or devotion which is to govern the ordinary actions of our life is to be found in almost every verse of Scripture. Our blessed Saviour and his apostles are wholly taken up in doctrines that relate to common life.” (*A Serious Call*, chap. i.).

The words even of Christ are not a law to the Christian, though men have seldom resisted the temptation to make law out of them. But this is to defeat their purpose and to misunderstand their occasion and their nature. No teacher ever took more pains to prevent literalism than he did. His whole manner of teaching was calculated to discourage this tendency to make precise rules for all time out of his free paradoxical sayings. "The words of truth," says Lao Tze, the Chinese philosopher, "are always paradoxical." The highest spiritual truths cannot be expressed in a definition, but only in a paradox. Christ's choice of the parable as his favourite method of instruction shews the same purpose,—to make men apprehend for themselves the true bearing of his teaching on the varying circumstances of their lives. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John vi. 63): whether this is an authentic word of Jesus or a disciple's description, the Christian conscience knows it for true; that is just what the sayings of Jesus are to us, searching, quickening, illuminating, ever fresh, and their spirit is never wholly

contained within the phrase of the past. The Spirit is still taking of the things of Christ and shewing them unto us (John xvi. 14).

Always more authoritative than the recorded words is the spirit of Christ. "The words of Jesus," wrote Auguste Sabatier, "do not find their end in themselves; they are only means. This is why they are so free, so suited to the occasion, so paradoxical, so foreign and rebellious to any systematic order. . . . His words are absolutely unfit to serve as a fulcrum for a new religion of authority. To undertake, from a superstitious notion of piety, to reduce them to dogmatic formulas is to shew a lack of comprehension of their spirit, their purpose, and their value."¹ This deliverance from literalism is the more necessary, since we cannot be sure of the *ipsissima verba* of Christ. The Gospels give instances of frequent misunderstanding by Christ's hearers, and the evangelists themselves are not immune from the same liability to error; they have recorded sayings in a form so out of harmony with the general mind of

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 287.

Jesus that some diffidence about their authenticity or their context is justifiable. Shelley said no more than would be admitted in judging the reputed utterances of any other whose sayings are recorded by those who are not great enough to understand them fully: "The rule of criticism to be adopted in judging of the life, actions, and words of a man who has acted any conspicuous part in the revolutions of the world, should not be narrow. We ought to form a general image of his character and of his doctrines, and refer to this whole the distinct portions of actions and speech by which they are diversified." Superficial contradictions may be expected, owing to the difference of occasion and feeling, but we may rightly suspect any deviations "which represent his own essential character in contradiction with itself."¹

Even when we have no reason to question the competence of the reporters of Christ's words, we have still to allow for the mental environment of an age very unlike ours. It is no longer claimed, except by a decreasing

¹ "Essay on Christianity," *Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism*, ed. J. Shawcross, pp. 102-3.

number of literalists, that Christians are bound to the beliefs which Jesus shared with his age, as, for example, in demoniac possession. As the Dean of St. Paul's has said, such current beliefs "are not themselves part of the new revelation; they belong to the soil in which it grew."¹ While we recognise the duty of cautious reserve in our use of a method so precarious, we can hardly doubt that there are texts where we do right to appeal from the words, which were often spoken *ad hominem* and were not of the nature of "official utterances,"² to the spirit of Christ as we have learnt it from the Gospels as a whole and assented to it in conscience. The deeper, said George Tyrrell, that his intimacy grew with the spirit of Christ, the less he seemed to fear "that freedom and fearlessness of mind, which was Christ's strongest characteristic."³ This freedom is not licence, but a freedom in the very spirit of Christ from the bondage of the letter, even the recorded letter of his words.

¹ W. R. Inge, *Truth and Falsehood in Religion*, p. 125. Cp. *Faith and its Psychology*, p. 138.

² A. Clutton Brock, *Studies in Christianity*, p. 73.

³ *Autobiography*, i. p. 215.

It is the freedom inspired by the mystical Christ: "Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

LECTURE II

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM ASSERTED BY ST. PAUL
BUT IMPAIRED IN SUCCEEDING AGES

SYNOPSIS

THE overwhelming sense of emancipation expressed by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians, the charter of Christian Freedom.

The apostle wished to liberate himself and others, not only from a particular system of law, but from the temper of mind which attached importance to the letter. The purpose of freedom is not licence but free service, a better service than the unfree can render.

His own natural individualism is restrained by his practical sense of the needs of the community. But the primitive discipline is concerned with moral laxity rather than with doctrinal error.

New Testament Christianity is marked by variety in creed and worship and organisation, although development in the direction of fixity can be discerned. The ecclesiastical mind is already recognisable in St. Matthew's Gospel.

This development is more rapid in the sub-apostolic and following ages. The most remarkable development is in theology. It was natural and right that the Greek Christian should philosophise, so long as his conclusions were not to be regarded as having exclusive rightness and finality. Was this insistence on orthodoxy comparable with our Lord's emphasis on "faith" ?

LECTURE II

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM ASSERTED BY ST. PAUL BUT IMPAIRED IN SUCCEEDING AGES

For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage.

GAL. V. 1, R. V. margin.¹

THE Epistle to the Galatians, wrote Baron von Soden, "is the charter of Christianity as a new, a universal religion. Christianity here finally shakes off the shell of Judaism, and starts upon its free progress among the nations of the world. . . . Herein all is inward and spiritual and therefore free."² And a more conservative scholar wrote in the same strain: "This epistle marks an epoch in the history of man: it is the ever precious document of his spiritual emancipation."³ The sense of

¹ On the reading adopted here, see Additional Note, p. 83.

² *The History of Early Christian Literature*, p. 70.

³ F. Godet, *Introduction to the New Testament*, i. p. 236, cited by Dr. Macgregor (*Christian Freedom*, p. 12), who also gives Schmiedel's bold description: "In all time Galatians will be the

deliverance, which is said by William James to be a characteristic of religious experience under almost all its varieties, has perhaps never been expressed with more intense conviction than by St. Paul in this letter. He is liberated in mind and spirit, he has come out of what he felt to be a galling and oppressive bondage into freedom, and his passionate nature exults in the liberty which he has found in Christ. He has escaped from the fetters of a system which cramped his moral and mental growth, and his whole outlook upon life has changed. For St. Paul, as for all great-hearted men, freedom is no mere negative term ; it connotes all that makes life vigorous and positive and effective. He is set free, so that at last he may render the perfect service of free obedience to the will of God, with the full exercise of his abundant vitality. In this epistle, and hardly less in the companion epistle to the Romans, he is so inspired by the thought of Christian freedom, that the word has no single meaning. In his use of this master-

charter of freedom, not only from the Mosaic Law, but from every yoke that is imposed upon the religious life as an external condition of salvation, without reference to any immediate necessity of the soul" (*Encycl. Bib. art. "Galatians"*).

word, there is "something chameleon-like,"¹ and, according to the context, it emphasises now one and now another aspect of his emancipation, and the total meaning gathers in volume as he proceeds. "For Paul the 'truth of the gospel' (Gal. ii. 5, 14) is almost synonymous with the freedom wherewith Christ hath made us free. No interpretation of Paul's thought will do justice to the facts which does not begin by recognising the central importance of this idea."²

The greatest deliverance which St. Paul experiences is from sin, from its power and its condemnation. The ancient Law had succeeded at least in making sin known to him. "Had it not been for the Law, I would never have known what sin meant" (Rom. vii. 7); and therefore he calls the Law "holy." And yet for him, however it might be for others, the Law had not brought release from sin, it only aggravated his sense of moral failure. The more overwhelming, therefore, is the sense of deliverance, when it comes; and it is

¹ J. Weiss, *Die Christliche Freiheit nach der Verkündigung des Apostels Paulus*, p. 12.

² C. A. A. Scott, in *Camb. Bibl. Essays*, p. 339.

Christ who is the Deliverer. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. . . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. vii. 25, viii. 2).

"If ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the Law" (Gal. v. 18). St. Paul carries further than his Master the idea of release from the Mosaic Law. He too claims to be fulfilling the Law, but it can only be in the broadest sense, by fulfilling the divine purpose which underlay the imperfect expression of that purpose in the actual Law. That purpose is discovered to be obedience to the great covering principle of love: "The whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Gal. v. 14; *cp.* Rom. xiii. 8). Do we then, he asks the Romans, abrogate the Law by this insistence on faith? "Nay, we establish the Law" (Rom. iii. 31). And yet his whole treatment of the Law shews that this "establishing" is only a confirmation of the moral law in its most general sense. As an institution, as a binding authority, of final appeal, the Law has had its day, served its purpose, and is super-

seded. It was a preparatory discipline for the days of minority, necessarily imperfect, and now no longer fit for full-grown men in Christ. From Jewish Christians the Law might claim a continuance of respect and such conformity as did not conflict with a higher law ; but its authority was no longer supreme ; it was at most secondary, and was to be interpreted by the spirit and not by the letter. For its letter was vexatious, and inimical to the life of the spirit. St. Paul is like a burnt child, shy even of the hearth-fire of his race, and afraid of a return to bondage.

It may be that St. Paul, like other converts to a new faith, was less than just to the faith which he had forsaken, and in his recoil from Judaism underestimated its still living power. No one now can question that there was much which was noble and inspiring in the religion of the Law, nor that for many devout disciples of the Law there went with that doctrine a sense of true freedom. God's commandment was to them "exceeding broad," and its observance was not felt as restraint but as true freedom.¹ "I will walk at liberty ; for I

¹ Cp. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 712.

have sought thy precepts." "Great is the peace that they have who love thy law; and they are not offended at it." (Ps. cxix. 96, 45, 165). Some share in that spiritual inheritance even St. Paul would hardly wish to forfeit, and by certain of his actions he shewed that he recognised the Law as still binding, in some degree, on Jewish Christians. But he was the first to recognise, without qualification, that the Christian religion could never become a world-religion if it remained bound to the Mosaic Law.

It was the large influx of Gentile converts which made it imperative to face this question. The issue had not been clear to the first generation of Christian believers. Jesus Christ had nowhere formally abrogated the Law, and his Jewish disciples continued in the traditional relationship to the Law; they "lingered in the porch of the Temple,"¹ even after Paul himself had broken away. Gentile converts, other than proselytes, were rare before St. Paul's preaching, and they were expected to accept the Law as part of the Christian faith and practice.

¹ G. G. Findlay, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 299.

There were, indeed, opportunist concessions from time to time to meet special cases. But with St. Paul it became a matter of principle, based on theory. No doubt, his personal experience came first, and only in the light of it and of the Gentile conversions came the theory, but his was not the mind to rest content with the matter unanalysed. He had definitely broken with the old theory of merit, that the way to acceptance with God lay through the observance of the Law; it had proved a negative way for himself, and he detected a dangerous tendency to self-deception besetting those who rested in the Law. Jesus Christ had pointed the same moral in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, but St. Paul generalised on this theme and wrought it into theory.

It became clear to the Apostle of the Gentiles that the Mosaic Law could not rightly be made binding on those who had no ancestral attachment to it. He insisted on the right of the Gentiles to admission into the Christian Church on equal terms with Jews, and without Jewish conditions. "Humanly speaking, this was Paul's discovery, his supreme contribution to

the interpretation of Jesus.”¹ For it was an implication drawn from the teaching of Jesus, rather than a warrant based on any explicit word of the Master. To draw out such implications was a serviceable development, which entered into the mind of Christ and was in harmony with it. “In the Pauline Epistles,” wrote Goldwin Smith, “we see Christianity detaching itself by a painful effort from Judaism, and we willingly believe that Paul is right in holding that the genuine tradition of Jesus is on the side of emancipation.”² St. Paul had not freed his converts from pagan bondage only to harness upon their unwilling backs the bondage of the Mosaic system. Yet he is definitely apprehensive that this will be their fate if they yield to the pressure of the older Christians. After they have once “come to know God,” will they turn back to “weak and beggarly rudiments”? “Why,” he asks the Galatians, “do you want to be enslaved all over again by them? You observe days and months and festal seasons and years. Why, you make me afraid I may have spent

¹ C. A. A. Scott, in *Camb. Bibl. Essays*, p. 339.

² *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*, p. 180.

my labour on you for nothing " (Gal. iv. 9, 10).¹ " I tell you, if you get circumcised, Christ will be no use to you. . . . You are for justification by the Law ? Then you are done with Christ, you have deserted grace " (v. 2, 4). He tells the Colossians that Christ had cancelled the bond with its rules and regulations and nailed it to his cross, and then pertinently advises them : " Let no one take you to task on questions of eating and drinking or in connection with the observance of festivals or new moons or sabbaths. All that is the mere shadow of what is to be. . . . Why submit to rules and regulations like, Hands off this, Taste not that, Touch not this ? . . . These rules are determined by human precepts and tenets " (Col. ii. 14-22). The apostle daringly classes together heathenism and Judaism, so far as both were attached to ceremonial regulations, and yet more daringly includes sabbaths in the list of things indifferent. But it was no random utterance, provoked by particular instances of legalism ; it re-appears

¹ This and the following quotations in this paragraph are taken, with permission, from Dr. Moffatt's *New Translation of the New Testament*. See preface, p. xvi.

as a principle in the calmer epistle to the Romans. "This man rates one day above another, while that man rates all days alike. Well, every one must be convinced in his own mind; the man who values a particular day does so to the Lord" (xiv. 5). So too about questions of food, the apostle represents it as a sign of weakness of faith to have scruples; for the sake only of the weaker brethren "we who are strong ought to bear the burdens that the weak make for themselves and us"; for himself St. Paul says, like his Master when he spoke "cleansing all meats,"—"I know, I am certain in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is in itself unclean." "Certainly keep your own conviction on the matter, as between yourself and God" (xiv. 14, 22, xv. 1).

The liberation, which the apostle has himself obtained, and would extend to others, is from more than any particular details or even from a whole system of external rules; it is quite as much from a temper of mind which attached such disproportionate importance to outward observances, and destroyed its peace in God with anxious scrupulousness. In entire contrast with this meticulous concern about

lesser things which do not on their own merit commend themselves to the reason and conscience, we notice St. Paul's freedom from care, his largeness of outlook, his joy in the Holy Spirit. His is a religion of the Spirit, and no longer a religion of law. To rely upon any external authority whatever, except in a strictly subordinate degree, was inconsistent with the religion of Christ, as he understood it. Paul is indeed bound to Christ, is his bond-servant, "under law to Christ" (1 Cor. ix. 21) but to no other. He refuses almost roughly to defer to the authority of any name, whether of Peter whom he "withstood to the face," or of Apollos.

It may be asked, Was this sheer individualism? Was it safe advice for any except a few grown men of the stature of St. Paul? The answer may be found, at least in part, in the apostle's own writings, and perhaps increasingly in the later epistles written in the light of his growing practical experience. If there was a strongly individualist vein in St. Paul's vigorous independent nature, which fought its own way through from bondage to Christian freedom, the logic

of facts pressed upon the founder of churches the needs of the community.¹ Though he had himself always seen that the value of freedom consisted in his being free to serve with his own fully developed personality, he could not fail to recognise that, for other men of less moral strength, liberation from old restraints might quickly degenerate into libertinism. "Legalism and licence were the Scylla and Charybdis," between which it needed St. Paul's "most firm and skilful pilotage to steer the bark of the Church."² The true freedom consists, not in the absence of regulation, but in "the right of self-regulation."³ So, while he tells the Galatians that they were called for freedom, almost in the same breath he warns them: "Only use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*" (Gal. v. 13, 14).

Love of the brethren suggests restraints,

¹ Dr. Macgregor illustrates the "almost fiercely individualistic" temper of St. Paul, esp. in chap. ii. *op. cit.*

² G. G. Findlay, *op. cit.* p. 345.

³ *Ibid.* p. 335.

and creates a self-discipline of freedom, as Paul had already found in his own life : " Though I was free from all men, I made myself servant unto all " (1 Cor. ix. 19). In effect he says : Give me freedom to develop my own conscience and personality, in order that I may render the best service of which I am capable ; and this I cannot do so long as I am fettered by obsolete minutiae. The purpose of freedom is free service, a better service than the unfree can render. The nobler type of free man would be content to forego some of his rightful freedom in things morally indifferent, where his boldness would only scandalise the weaker brethren ; not for the sake of meat would he cause to stumble one of those for whom Christ died. A true regard for the Christian fellowship would suggest desirable, though it might be temporary, restrictions upon personal liberty. Yet such concessions, made in the interests of the Beloved Community, are not to lead to the formation of new bondages or to the re-imposition of old. " For freedom did Christ set us free : stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage."

Institutions, and an institutional life, were necessary to the community of believers, but they were one and all accessories, aids, means ; forms might change, and should change as need arose, but the letter must never again rank above the spirit.

Within the Christian society discipline had a needful place, but it is significant that the apostle's concern was always more with moral laxity than with doctrinal error.¹ With the latter he would use all his powers of persuasion, but he would not resort to excluding any from the Church on doctrinal grounds only. There is no hint that a disbelief even about the resurrection of the Lord brought with it ecclesiastical discipline, but unrepented and persistent sensuality was sure of it. The carnal mind, revealing itself whether in sins of the flesh or in pride and unbrotherliness, was the chief danger, the worst kind of infection of the Christian body. Christian living was

¹ Cp. H. H. Henson, *The Creed in the Pulpit*, p. 344 : " There is stern language of warning in the New Testament, but, if you read carefully, you will find that it is always connected with moral obliquity and unfaithfulness, never with merely intellectual error. The great offence of Christian theologians has been their transference of language directed against moral fault to the case of erroneous opinion."

still of more account in the churches of Paul's founding than Christian theory. Even the faith which St. Paul so strongly emphasised was not a body of doctrine but "a decisive moral act of trust,"¹ and it is faith of this sort which saves the soul. He disclaims "lordship" over men's personal faith (2 Cor. i. 24). The Pauline emphasis is ethical more than doctrinal; and even where it is doctrinal in form and subject, it is ethical at heart and of purpose. Later ages, including the Reformation age and its successors, have tilted the balance, and have made of St. Paul a theologian binding a highly articulated theology on the Church, instead of a man of faith who loved and encouraged freedom. He did not break with Judaism only to fasten Paulinism on succeeding generations.² This free spiritual life was indeed rooted in faith, and especially in a vivid apprehension of the character of "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." There is immediate liberation from old fears and superstitions in the thought of God as one whom

¹ W. R. Inge, *Faith*, p. 13.

² Cp. A. Deissmann, *St. Paul*, esp. pp. 4-7, 232, and P. Gardner, *The Religious Experience of St. Paul*.

Christ taught men to approach with the dear name of Abba, Father. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 14). They are no longer servants but sons, who obey of free choice and because they freely assent to the law of God, written not on tablets but upon the heart and conscience. And Gentiles were as free of access to the Father of all spirits as were Jews. It was a great expansion of the spiritual horizon when the Christ who is for all men was represented by St. Paul as throwing down the partition-walls between races, ranks and sexes. Truly, as the religion of Christ passed through the mind of Paul into the mind of the generations yet to be, it was still a place of liberty into which he invited them; "for ye, brethren, were called for freedom."¹

On the matter of Christian freedom the Epistle of St. James is in close and often verbal agreement with St. Paul's teaching. The Christian principle of life is a law of liberty,

¹ This view of St. Paul as furthering the interests of Christian freedom may need to be qualified by the reflection that Paulinism has, at certain epochs especially, diverted the attention of the church from the simpler religious teaching of Christ, but I take this (I hope, rightly) to have been in spite of St. Paul's own intention.

“the perfect law” in the sense that it consummates and realizes the meaning of the Old Law. St. James, like St. Paul, identifies the New Law with the single law or principle of love; and this he calls the Royal law, the paramount law which is to rule the whole of a Christian man’s action and consideration. But it is exacting, because no merely external fulfilment will satisfy the demands of love; therefore, like St. Paul again, St. James gives a warning, which is also an appeal to all that is best in man: “So speak ye, and so do, as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty.”¹

As we review New Testament Christianity as a whole, we feel ourselves in the presence of a vigorous community with the spring of youth, conscious of an unparalleled stirring of the Spirit, and only dimly conscious as yet of the practical needs of a settled institutional life, and perhaps discounting its importance in view of the expected Advent of their Lord. The New Testament is “the record of a moment

¹ James, i. 25, ii. 8-13. Cp. J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James*, *ad loc.*

of freedom " before the Christian community is subjected to institutions.¹ The various churches still enjoy a wide latitude in creed and ritual and organisation. It is variety, not uniformity, which the New Testament emphasises as the full life of the Spirit-bearing body. We do not find uniformity where we might most naturally expect it. Within the New Testament, fragmentary record of primitive Christianity though it is, we find the Lord's own prayer circulating in two forms ; the rite of Baptism administered " in the name of the Lord Jesus " according to Acts and the Pauline Epistles, but according to St. Matthew's Gospel in the Triune Name ; and in the Sacred Meal St Luke, who, in Dr. Wright's judgment, " appears to be following a local Church usage," places the passing of the Cup before the distributing of the Bread. " Identity of use is the product of later days." ² In worship

¹ J. Oman, *The Problem of Faith and Freedom*, p. 322.

² A. Wright, *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, p. xxii. He compares the order in 1 Cor. x. 16 (*ctr.* xi. 23-26) and in *Didache*, § 9. But, in view of the probably composite nature of the canonical text of Luke xxii. 14-20, it is precarious to treat it as evidence of liturgical practice. If, as some scholars think, verses 19 and 20 are a later interpolation, modelled on 1 Cor. xi. 23-25, St. Luke's own words (vv. 14-18) make no mention of the Bread, perhaps

and in ministry there is not one type but many; sometimes, perhaps usually, we find a simple congregational worship, modelled apparently on the usage of the synagogue; at Corinth something very like a Quakers' meeting. We find local presbyters, but also itinerant apostles (more than the original Twelve), prophets and evangelists; and in the Pastoral Epistles something that may easily grow, though it has not yet grown, into monarchical episcopacy. Even those scholars who are most concerned to find scriptural or apostolic warrant for later developments frankly allow that in New Testament days the organisation of the ministry was still fluid, and might have developed in this direction or in that.¹ No one type of ministry, except the apostles alone, could claim the Lord's express sanction and appointment. His church was still free to follow the leading of the Spirit, and to adapt the forms of its life to meet its changing and growing needs.

because he is concerned to shew that it was a passover meal ("this passover," v. 15), where wine had a place but bread was replaced by unleavened biscuit. The latter is, however, called "bread," e.g. in Deut. xvi. 3 and the Jewish liturgy.

¹ Cp. A. E. J. Rawlinson in *Foundations*, p. 382-6, and H. B. Swete (Ed.) *The Early History of the Church and the Ministry*.

So too in the matter of formal belief, if there was "one faith," "the same attitude of the soul to Christ,"¹ there were many theologies. St. Paul's Christology is his own, it is not identical with St. Peter's or St. John's or the Synoptists'. Christ's religion, as yet understood, "meant, not a system of doctrines such as the Christian community afterwards devised, but a spirit of life,"² the life "in Christ" as St. Paul described it. It is true that even within the New Testament both thought and practice were developing, and were bound to develop further. St. Paul had already, as has been stated, drawn out into explicit language and formulated theory what he believed to be implicit in the words and actions of his Master; and he had also been analysing and formulating his deep experience of what Christ meant to him in his inner life, and had reached a lofty doctrine of the indwelling Christ and of the exalted Christ. In the later epistles, if they may be accepted as his, the idea of the Church as the

¹ J. Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*, pp. 395-6. Cp. H. H. Jensen, *The Creed in the Pulpit*, p. 336.

² B. Jowett, *Doctrinal Sermons*, p. 91, 92.

Body of Christ was increasingly engaging his thoughts.

At a later date, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, there is a conception of the Church, which, however closely it reflects the contemporary conditions of church-life, probably goes beyond what Jesus of Nazareth had actually said to his disciples. It is difficult to believe that Jesus said to them "Tell it unto the church," before any church had come into existence¹; it is impossible to believe that he who was known as "a friend of publicans and sinners" gave a ruling about one who refused to "hear the church" in such terms as—"Let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican" (Matt. xviii. 17). We may also have mis-giving when this evangelist comes nearer to identifying the church with the Kingdom which Jesus preached than there is warrant for in his parables and pregnant sayings. The evangelist, "at once Jew and Christian," as Renan calls him, is something of "a Christian Rabbi." According to this Gospel, "the disciples are . . . bound together by a New Law, which takes the place of the Old. The

¹ Inge, *Faith*, p. 119.

keynote of the work is not the opposition of Law and Grace, as in St. Paul, but the opposition of the Old Law and the New Law.”¹

When we pass beyond the New Testament, the progress towards fixity of form, both in doctrine and organisation, is naturally more rapid. This tendency was well nigh irresistible, and its advantage in securing greater stability was quickly recognised. Much that was irregular and informal and experimental in the early days must give way, in a settled church life, to the interests of order and common agreement. Dr. Oman can speak of “a new Christian legalism” as having already displaced “the freedom of Paul” by the time of the Apostolic Fathers.² Increasingly Church unity was promoted by emphasising the right of the Church to prescribe uniformity of thought and practice, even in things indifferent, though the liberty of the Christian man deserved respect, according to the wiser teaching of St. Paul. And with this loss of liberty goes much

¹ F. C. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, p. 188.

² J. Oman, *op. cit.* p. 318.

of that joyful sense of emancipation from servitude which characterised St. Paul's utterances. We have travelled far from the spirit of the apostle, as well as from the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, when the author of *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* interprets the Lord's words *When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites* in this fashion: "For they (the hypocrites) fast on the second and fifth days of the week, but do ye fast on the fourth and sixth."¹

We are yet further from Christ when we find Tertullian assuming that the revelation is "a definite body of doctrines and practices so fully given to the apostles and delivered by them to the churches that the Holy Spirit cannot have any fresh light to throw on it, or at any rate will give none to those who for any reason are outside the visible churches."² This "prince among rigorists," as Professor Gwatkin called him, "was no

¹ *Didache*, § 8. Even if this book "at best illustrates the practice of some remote church" (Swete, *op. cit.* p. xii.), its legalism could be paralleled in more central churches of the second century.

² These are not Tertullian's words but Prof. Gwatkin's summary of his teaching (*Early Church History*, ii. 247).

friend of publicans and sinners. To him the Gospel is a rigid law, and the heinous sinner is once for all beyond the reach of mercy. Christ will plead no more for him, and wrath shall come upon him to the uttermost. Forgiveness is not until seventy times seven, but after baptism not even once. The heretics he fought were many and dangerous; yet is not Tertullian himself among the worst of them, when he slanders Christ as merciless? ”¹ Nor can we recognise the spirit of Christ in St. Augustine's teaching about the damnation of unbaptised infants. It was useless for the Christian to have escaped from the bondage of circumcision, only to have settled down to so rigorous and remorseless a doctrine of baptism. Men and women of Christian or humane feeling could only have accepted such a doctrine because they believed it to rest

¹ Gwatkin, ii. 238. To Tertullian's credit, however, must be placed the fine saying, "to force religion is irreligious" (*Ad Scapulam*, c. 2), although something must be deducted from its virtue, since the writer is pleading against Imperial persecution of his own religion, not laying down a principle for Christians to observe in their treatment of fellow-Christians. There is, indeed, much else to Tertullian's credit, as may be seen in Mr. T. R. Glover's fine and sympathetic chapter on "the first great Puritan of the West," in his *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*.

upon an inspired authority which it was irreverence to question.¹

Among all the developments of Catholic Church life the most remarkable and important is the development of theology. No one who has once read Dr. Hatch's famous comparison between the Sermon on the Mount and the Nicene Creed—"The one belongs to a world of Syrian peasants, the other to a world of Greek philosophers"—can ever dismiss it from the mind, and few, I imagine, even among those who hold with greatest conviction to traditional theology, can be entirely without misgivings, as to whether that development did not suffer from excess. "If any one thinks," continues Dr. Hatch, "that it (*i.e.* the above contrast) is sufficiently

¹ On the dutiful stifling of the moral feelings, in order to give assent to this doctrine, see W. E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals*, i. 96-8; also, the same writer's *Rationalism*, ii. 22, on St. Augustine as "the framer and representative of the system of intolerance." St. Augustine had once favoured freedom: on his change of mind to a belief in coercive methods, see Archdeacon Hobhouse's Bampton Lectures, *The Church and the World*, additional notes "Patristic Opinions on Tolerance and Coercion" and "The Influence of St. Augustine upon Religious Coercion" (pp. 372 f., 377 f.). Reference may also be made to this book for its consideration of religious freedom in the Middle Ages, for which I had not space in these lectures.

explained by saying that the one is a sermon and the other a creed, it must be pointed out in reply that the question "is " why an ethical sermon stood in the forefront of the teaching of Jesus Christ, and a metaphysical creed in the forefront of the Christianity of the fourth century. . . . It asks, not how did the Christian societies come to believe one proposition rather than another, but how did they come to the frame of mind which attached importance to either the one or the other, and made the assent to the one rather than the other a condition of membership." ¹ Dr. Hatch finds the main answer to his question in the influence of Greek thought upon Christianity.

Apart from justifying or criticising any particular conclusions which were reached by orthodox Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries, the general tendency towards more explicit definition of the Christian belief has much to be said in its defence. The

¹ E. Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, Hibbert Lectures, 1888, pp. 1, 2. The present writer would hesitate to say that the Sermon stood in the forefront of Christ's teaching, but he regards the Synoptists' account of that teaching as bearing out in the main the contrast affirmed by Dr. Hatch.

Greek philosopher, if he embraced Christianity, could not think as the Syrian peasant thought ; it was not even desirable that he should attempt to do so, he had better be himself, that is, one who from habit and training is driven to philosophise ; he seeks to analyse his faith, and to interpret it in terms of current philosophy as naturally and rightly as scholars of our own day desire to express their faith on its intellectual side with the help of the philosophical ideas and the scientific and historical methods which rule the thinking of our times. The Christian philosophers of the early centuries were within their rights ; more than that, they were rendering their particular service in making a serious attempt to adjust the primitive faith to the best thought of their generation. They were only exceeding their province, if they claimed, or encouraged others to claim for them, that their conclusions had exclusive rightness and finality.

The religion of Christ had something to gain by contact with other cultures and peoples than those which it had found in the narrow home of its origin. “ The Christian faith has drawn the elements of its growth, not only from

its roots (*i.e.* in Jewish soil), but also from the atmosphere into which it has pushed its branches.”¹ “It is only in the soil of Paganism that Christianity can come to maturity.”² The ultimate goal is a synthesis of the many aspects of truth, which widely differing streams of thought and life will have contributed.³ The Kingdom of God was likened by the Lord himself to a seed sown and destined to grow to something other than the seed, though organically connected with it; and to leaven, which was meant not to remain as leaven but to disperse its virtue through the whole lump of the world’s life and thought, effecting change and losing its own separateness. Christianity could not be in the fourth century what it had been in the first: men could not, as Jowett has said, “shut up their thought within the measure of the evangelists or even of St. Paul.” It had to grow and to

¹ R. E. Bartlett, *op. cit.* p. 36.

² G. Lowes Dickinson, *A Modern Symposium*, p. 157. The words are assigned to the last speaker in the symposium, Geoffrey Vivian, a man of letters.

³ Cp. E. Caird, *op. cit.* p. 67. “True Christianity is not something that was once published in Palestine, and which has been handed down by a dead tradition ever since; it is a living and growing spirit that learns the lessons of history, and is ever manifesting new powers and leading us to new truths.”

change as the condition of being really alive. "When you want to convince yourself of the identity of an individual, you do not try to squeeze him into his cradle."¹ On general grounds too it may be urged that the developed has commonly an advantage over the undeveloped; the analysed and explicit is an advance upon the unanalysed and implicit; what is felt but not yet thought out is awaiting the service of the intelligence upon it.

Christ's purpose was to start a spiritual movement which from its very nature was intended to develop; he did not fasten upon Christians for all time a completed system, whether of thought or practice. The Christian scribe of the Kingdom was to bring out of his treasury things new as well as old. In Professor Percy Gardner's recent words: "Christianity was not a system revealed once for all and fixed, but a principle of life and progress, . . . assimilating gradually all that was good in the heathen world"; it is not static, but dynamic and evolutionary.² We

¹ Inge, *Faith*, p. 170, paraphrasing a saying of Loisy (*L'Evangile et l'Eglise*, p. 160).

² *Hibbert Journal*, Oct. 1917.

have commonly regarded it as an asset of the Christian religion that it has shewn a notable capacity for assimilation. It has, upon the whole, derived strength from its ability to draw to itself and use in its service the Greek subtlety of thought, the Roman gift of organisation, and the moral earnestness of Northern Europe ; and it may yet have much to gain from the mystical thought of India.

But while development and assimilation are essential features of the Christian religion, there are criteria for determining the legitimacy of any particular developments. The Dean of St. Paul's gives one, perhaps the most important, criterion : " The Church is to grow up *into* Christ in all things, not out of Him into something very different." ¹ It is legitimate to outgrow and discard the temporary setting of the primitive faith, as time reveals its imperfection and inadequacy ; it is even permissible to go beyond the recorded words of Christ in the spirit of Christ ; but to depart from the spirit of Christ is to lose the identity worth preserving with the original faith, and to go along a road which will need to be

¹ Inge, *op. cit.* p. 138.

retraced to the starting-point. And therefore an answer must be found to the question which is asked in our day by the ever increasing number of those who have the *anima naturaliter Christiana* but who cannot express their faith in the terms of the creed-making age : Was this rigid orthodoxy, which shut out from membership of Christ's Church all who would not assent to the definitions of the nature of Christ's person, according to the spirit of Christ's teaching ? Was this emphasis upon correct opinion at all comparable with our Lord's emphasis upon faith ? Was not that "faith" which he looked for like the typically Jewish conception of faith—a simple trust in God, as much a moral as an intellectual act ? ¹

Theology is the natural complement of faith, the contribution of the mind to the understanding of the heart's experience, but it is not itself the faith which saves. There is nothing in this view which is disparaging to theology, or which would discard it as

¹ On the resemblance between the Old Testament conception of "faith" and Christ's, see Montefiore, *Liberal Judaism and Hellenism*, p. 112.

unnecessary or valueless. The superiority of analysed to unanalysed ideas has already been asserted. It was every way right that Greek thought, like the thought of our own day, should exercise itself freely and exhaustively upon the material of Christian belief. Greek thought largely justified itself by liberating the Christian faith from some of its primitive Jewish accompaniments, by giving a reasoned basis for beliefs which were held by simple unreasoning acceptance, and by working out a theology which will ever command a reverent attention for its massive thoroughness and its sublimity. But would it not be sufficient to recognise the theology of the fourth century for what it really is, namely, profound speculations upon the ultimate truths of our Christian faith, not the faith which saves ? ¹ To regard them as the best and most fruitful speculations of a remarkable age, the personal convictions of many of the greatest Christian

¹ Cp. Hatch, *op. cit.* pp. 137, 8. "Under the touch of Greek philosophy, knowledge had become speculation. . . . The belief that metaphysical theology is more than this, is the chief bequest of Greece to religious thought, and it has been a *damnosa hereditas*. It has given to later Christianity that part of it which is doomed to perish, and which yet, while it lives, holds the key of the prison-house of many souls." See further, on this point, *infra*, p. 145 f.

saints then and since, is to do them no dishonour, nor to deprive them of the legitimate authority which belongs to Christian experience. But to regard them as the truth itself, more authoritative than the scriptures,¹ to treat them as final and unalterable, and to bind them upon men's consciences to-day, is to rob Christians of their birthright, of the freedom for which Christ set them free. We can honour the champions of Christian faith in other days, and even be patient with them when they fought, as their opponents also fought, with the weapons of anathema and excommunication.² But these are not the weapons which can be used any longer "in a

¹ This is not, of course, the official view of the Church of England according to its Articles of Religion, where the ground of the acceptance of the creeds is that "they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture" (Art. viii cp. Art. xx). If the scriptural warrant for some beliefs is shewn by trustworthy Christian scholars to be less certain than was once thought, the corresponding articles of the creeds are similarly affected. As Professor Gwatkin observes (*History of Church and State*, p. 221, note), the creeds "have no independent authority," according to the Anglican theory expounded in the Articles. Yet it is a common experience to find Anglican Churchmen assigning to the creeds an original authority, though it is properly an authority derived from Scripture, and dependent on the correct interpretation of Scripture.

² F. Ruffini, *Religious Liberty*, p. 25, shews that the heterodox set the bad example of persecution and intolerance.

world which is intellectually free.”¹ No other philosophy of life seeks to establish its claim by such methods: a fair field and free play for rival speculations, in science and philosophy and historical enquiry, are accepted universally as the best road to the attainment of truth. Christian disciples should not come behind the rest of the world in the measure of their trust in the methods of freedom, and in the courageous faith that truth is great and prevails.

There need be no fear that the historic confessions of faith will be less regarded if they are no longer to be artificially protected. Rather it is that protection which creates in many minds a prejudice against them.² The lively interest of our age in the growth of ideas will ensure the continued importance of the ancient creeds in the history of Christian thought and civilisation. We cannot hope to understand Christianity merely by what it was at the beginning, we must know also what it has actually been in the lives and minds of Christian men and women throughout the centuries. In the great church of the Catholic

¹ Denney, *op. cit.* p. 383.

² *Ibid.*, p. 388.

creeds the saints, or at any rate very many of them, have dwelt secure, and have drawn from its fellowship and worship and teaching the inspiration of their lives. But they may not have been equally successful in analysing the real ground of their faith. The saints, as such, may well be more trustworthy for their intuitions than for the reasons they gave for them. Their holiness gave them no special insight into problems of historical evidence or literary judgment, about which their knowledge was strictly limited by their possession of the appropriate faculties and by the intellectual conditions of their age. Their faith was not misplaced, and it is attested in their lives, but this faith of theirs which bore such fruit must not be hastily identified with their formal presentation of it.

For faith in Christ is something intimately personal and only partly articulate, whether in their case or in ours. Our faith is helped by the Christian thought of the past, and can only neglect it at peril, but we must refuse it as a yoke imposed upon the mind without appeal. Our appeal is from what Christians have said about Christ to Christ himself, and

in the spirit of him, who fearlessly joined issue with the traditions and conventional usages of his day, we too must stand fast by the freedom he gave us, and not again be entangled with a yoke of bondage.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON THE TEXT OF GAL. v. 1

The lecturer may be expected to justify his choice of the marginal reading of the Revised Version—"For freedom did Christ set us free," especially as Mr. Hulse desired that the lecturer on his foundation should, *inter alia*, explain some of the more difficult texts of Holy Scripture. The numerous and baffling variations in the text of Gal. v. 1 may be conveniently seen in Bishop Lightfoot's *Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 200 f. Lightfoot prefers the reading τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡ, with the enclitic οὖν standing after στήκετε, and connects it, without punctuation marks, with the preceding verse (iv. 31). Westcott and Hort (*The New Testament in the original Greek*, vol. ii., p. 122) conclude that "even as a conjecture the insertion of ἡ is improbable; the resulting diction being languid and redundant." In a note (ii., p. 122; cp. i., p. 572), for which Dr. Hort alone is responsible, he suggests that ΤΗ is a primitive corruption of ΕΠ. If that emendation be adopted, there is additional force in the unquestioned reading of ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ in verse 13 ("For ye, brethren, were called for freedom"), when "the thread of verse 1 is taken up afresh after the digression of vv. 2-12." As Dr. Findlay says (*Ep. Gal.*,

p. 300, note), "this emendation gives an excellent and apposite sense : *For (with a view to) freedom Christ set us free.*"

The same sense is obtainable, though with less grammatical certitude, if the Greek text adopted by the Revisers and by Westcott and Hort is followed. Lightfoot also allows this text as an alternative reading, on account of the strong testimony in its favour. He recognises the grammatical difficulty of the absence of a preposition, which Hort's emendation, published sixteen years later, supplies : "the dative '*with*' or '*in*' or '*for* freedom' is awkward, in whatever way it is taken." But Lightfoot's interpretation of this reading agrees with the sense adopted in these lectures : "the force of this detached sentence will be, 'Did Christ liberate us that we might be slaves? no, but that we might be free'."

Sir W. M. Ramsay (*Historical Commentary on Galatians*, p. 434) regards the R. V. marginal rendering, "for freedom," as "undoubtedly right." It is adopted for the main text by the American Revision Committee.

LECTURE III

INCOMPLETENESS OF THE REFORMATION AS
AN EMANCIPATING MOVEMENT.

SYNOPSIS

THE religious experience of St. Paul is largely reproduced in Martin Luther. The note of emancipation in *The Liberty of a Christian Man* (1520).

The Reformation was less a liberation of mind, like the Renaissance, than a liberation of conscience. Its promise of intellectual emancipation was defeated by the growth of a new Protestant scholasticism and by resort to the old authoritarian methods of church discipline. The Bible, indeed, brought an enlargement of religious liberty to the individual Christian, but the authority of the Bible was dangerously exalted, partly in the polemical interests of Protestantism. George Fox's timely protest.

Besides the services to religious freedom of certain of the sects, in England and on the continent, the Church of England also has never lacked representative sons who have protested against narrowing the conditions of church membership. Cranmer and Hooker. Lord Falkland's Oxford friends at Great Tew. The Cambridge Platonists. *The Naked Truth* (1675). Bishop Burnet and the movement for comprehension. The agitation against subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles in the eighteenth century.

Edmund Burke's dictum: "The Reformation is not complete."

LECTURE III

INCOMPLETENESS OF THE REFORMATION AS AN EMANCIPATING MOVEMENT.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear : but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Rom. viii. 14, 15.

It is the religious experience, rather than the theology, of St. Paul, that is reproduced in Martin Luther. Both men had striven with all possible earnestness to work out their own salvation within the religious system in which they had been born and bred. The Austin friar was as fervid in his monastic zeal as Saul was in his Pharisaism. But the more feverishly they sought peace with God along the lines of the inherited system, the more acutely conscious they became of its inadequacy to "speak to their condition." To both men there came, after prolonged distress of mind and spirit, a change of faith, which they alike

describe as liberation from a religion of law and as a discovery of Christ's Gospel bringing peace and joy and freedom. In St. Paul's epistles to the Romans and the Galatians Luther read his own struggle and the way out ; and the note of emancipation from an intolerable bondage of law is as firmly struck by Luther as by Paul. It is not to my present purpose, nor is it within my competence, to discuss whether Luther rightly understood St. Paul's use of the prophetic words, " The just shall live by faith " ; still less to decide whether the apostle's interpretation of Habakkuk's words was legitimate. It is enough to say that Luther in his own way adopted them, and made them central to his faith ; and the corollary of that doctrine is expressed by him in the least controversial and most religious of his three great Reformation treatises of 1520. He gives it the significant title, *The Liberty of a Christian man*.

When Luther proclaimed his religious experience to the world, he, like St. Paul, awakened an immediate and wide-spread response. He revealed what was in the hearts of countless others, and the Reformation movement was

to half Europe a liberation of conscience. In its first enthusiasm there was a freshness, a sense of burdens removed and of new-born freedom, as conspicuous as in the earliest Christian literature.

In Luther's recoil from the mediaeval church system, which he stigmatised as "an intolerable bondage to human works and laws," he was no doubt less than just to it, as Paul also was unduly negative in his treatment of the religion of the Law. The mediaeval church had excuse, some would say justification, for its rigid disciplining of life and thought in the rude times when half-barbarous peoples had first passed under the civilising influence of Latin Christianity. There is reason for the alternating emphasis upon law and upon gospel at the varying stages of Christian history, but it was high time when Luther spoke for a shifting of the emphasis. In the generations immediately preceding the Reformation there were stirrings of a new religious life, which was uneasy within the old church system, and was not the less uneasy when the stringency of church authority was increased to meet the supposed danger. The church had not known

how to deal with its recent prophetic sons, with Wyclif, Huss and Savonarola.¹ The Church Councils of the fifteenth century had encouraged hopes, but had proved unable to reform the practical abuses which all good men admitted and deplored. The general tutelage of the church, especially of a church which had been fast losing its moral authority, became an anachronism in that new world of intellectual life which the Renaissance had created. That movement was in part an assertion of the secular or lay mind against the clerical control of the intellectual life. It effected an emancipation of the mind, while the Reformation was rather a liberation of the conscience; yet the later movement could not but be affected by the earlier, from which it was in part derived, and to which it owed some of its weapons. The Renaissance prepared the ground for the Reformation by its ridicule of the old scholasticism, its subtle undermining of traditional beliefs and customs, its wider human interests, and its spirit of

¹ Cp. J. E. B. Mayor's pithy saying: "The church must be content to let tares and wheat grow together; or it may burn the wheat, a John Huss or Hugh Latimer, and leave the tares, an Alva or Alexander VI., to grow" (*Twelve Cambridge Sermons*, p. 12).

emancipation. The Renaissance itself was not at first dangerous to the church, because its representative men, at any rate in Southern Europe, were lacking in moral earnestness and religious interest; and the way was made easy for an accommodation with the church by a none too serious conformity. A Renaissance scholar might shew up the forgery of the Donation of Constantine, on which the Papal claims were commonly based, and yet be given and accept office at the Papal court. But there arose later in Northern Europe scholars sufficiently in earnest to recognise the bearing of the New Learning on current church teaching and practice.

Yet it was not so much any criticism of the received theology as a dissatisfaction with the spiritual and moral effects of the existing church life which began the Reformation movement.¹ "How shall Christ be a Christ

¹ An admirable statement of the character of the Reformation and of its far-reaching implications has been recently given in Bartlet and Carlyle's *Christianity in History*, p. 528. "In a word, the great movement of the sixteenth century was not a revolt against the religious principles of historical Christianity, or even against the mediaeval conception of it as a whole, but rather against the organised system of authority which had for so long controlled man's relations with God. It may, however, be said,

for you and for me ? ” was its first cry, a religious cry, from the theology of the heart, rather than the scholar’s cry for more light or for intellectual freedom. “ How shall I get into right relations with God ? ” “ Not by the works of the law,” is Luther’s answer in Paul’s words, and Luther understood “ works ” to be in his day “ those innumerable commands and precepts ” of the church, which were imposed as necessary to salvation. The Christian man, Luther declared, is free from all these external commands, except so far as they serve his need, or—as he ought also to remember—the need of others ; “ for a Christian man does not live in himself, but in his neighbour,” “ each should become to other as a sort of Christ.” “ A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none,” but also—and here is an echo of the Pauline paradox—“ the Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to all.”¹

and with truth, that when the reformers challenged the authority of the Church, they raised questions which would inevitably be pressed much further than they themselves intended. The time was coming, had indeed already come, when the whole traditional system of knowledge and thought was to be shaken.”

¹ The above quotations are taken from the English translation of *Luther’s Primary Works*, edited by Wace and Buchheim.

Merely, therefore, to refuse compliance with innocent and indifferent church customs is neither charity nor reason. Luther recognised that "we cannot live in the world without ceremonies and works"; they have their value, as scaffolding has, and he shewed tenderness towards old usages. Very unlike the later Puritan obstinacy in refusing the surplice or the ring in marriage is Luther's easy compliance. He writes to a pastor who is troubled about conformity that, if his noble patron allows him to administer the sacraments and preach the gospel purely, he need not scruple: "in God's name, go round in the processions," and, if one vestment be not enough, "put on three, as Aaron did. . . . For such things, if not abused, neither add to nor take from the Gospel, but they must never be regarded as necessary nor made a matter of conscience."¹

One may admit to the full the frequent inconsistency and exaggeration to be found in Luther's writings, and yet feel that his protest was timely. The balance needed

¹ *Letters* (tr. Currie), p. 379. This racy letter may also be read in Dr. Macgregor's *Christian Freedom* (p. 231), which gives a wealth of equally happy illustrations.

correcting, even if he was not the man to adjust it with any delicacy. The externals of religion were in fact commonly taken for religion itself, ecclesiastical offences were ranked with moral sins, the monastic life was exalted above home life, and in general the individual was sacrificed to the institution. Yet the institution, with its rites and its ministers, was made for man, and not he for it. The Christian man's faith could no longer be simply identified with assent to the church's creed, nor the Christian's duty with carrying out the church's requirements. Luther and Calvin, and still more the organisers of Reformed churches in the next generation, would before long be creating a new ecclesiasticism and a new dogmatism; yet the Reformation spirit was greater than they, and it opened out questions, which, if they were repressed for a time, would continue to press for an answer in accordance with the principle of *The Liberty of a Christian man*. "The value of the Reformation is not so much in what it did, as in what it made possible"; I would add, in what its spirit may yet make possible, for the heaven is still working.

The limitations and inconsistencies of Luther are obvious. He had not worked free from the old uncritical literalism, which appears in his writings in startling contrast with his bolder and revolutionary utterances. The former spirit is shewn at the conference with the Swiss Reformers on the nature of Christ's presence in the Sacrament, when Luther chalked on the table *Hoc est corpus meum*, and "pressed the literal interpretation of the words whenever any concession was asked of him."¹ The fatal cleavage between the reformers on the subject of the sacrament of Christian brotherhood was not bridged, and it boded ill that Luther would allow no latitude in understanding a doctrine about which there was no concurrence of opinion in the primitive church. "In doubtful cases," and surely this was one, "the presumption is always in favour of freedom,"² but Luther would not give way, although his interpretation was hardly less difficult to sustain than the mediaeval. Moreover, Luther's deference to the civil power was no satisfactory

¹ C. Beard, *The Reformation*, p. 138.

² C. Bigg, *Wayside Sketches in Ecclesiastical History*, p. 179.

exchange for submission to the old church authority, and it led him and his followers to look to the arm of the prince to repress the excesses, real and imagined, of Anabaptists and other sectaries. "He and the Reformation with him became harder, more dogmatic, less spiritual, less universal." ¹

Calvin at any rate appreciated to the full the spiritual independence of the Christian church, but the inquisitorial power of his theocracy was a new menace to freedom. "Nothing more unlike liberty could be found," wrote Lord Acton, "than the state of Geneva when Calvin was the most important man there." ² And the Institutes of that powerful thinker, for all their sublimity and logical strength, quite as much as his treatment of the heretic Servetus, shewed him to be still "mediaeval in temper and method." ³

¹ Beard, *op. cit.* p. 200. The author dates the change in Luther from the time of the Peasants' Revolt, 1524-6.

² *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 134. Archdeacon Hobhouse says of Calvin's earnest attempt to set up a Civitas Dei on the basis of enforced uniformity in faith and morals: "If the endeavour failed, it is because all religious systems which refuse to respect human freedom are in the end found to be a fighting against Nature, and therefore a fighting against God" (*The Church and the World*, p. 231).

³ A. Fawkes, *Studies in Modernism*, p. 268.

A new protestant scholasticism was fast arising, which would bind the reformed churches as straitly as the decrees of the Council of Trent were to bind the Roman Church, and they would be tempted to use the old methods of coercion, in order to constrain thought and practice. The mediaeval conception of church authority was still deeply ingrained in the mind of the reformers, when they turned their hand to the task of disciplining the new churches; the test of membership and of the right to teach was the new orthodoxy, minutely articulated and amplified in that rage for definition which possessed the second and later stages of the Reformation. There was, indeed, a real deference to the supreme authority of the Bible, and a nominal recognition of the Christian man's right to interpret it, but in practice he must square his interpretation with the protestant confessions and articles of faith, or else hold his peace. The way of the inquirer was made hard and dangerous. Thus a movement, which had promised to liberate mind as well as conscience, was already fettering the one and must in the end embarrass the other.

But I would not undervalue the increase of freedom which had come to the individual Christian in his possession and diligent use of the Bible. It bred in him a sturdy spiritual independence, it afforded him an accepted criterion of what was taught and practised in his church, and it made him actually less dependent on that teaching and discipline because he drew his spiritual life in large part directly from the Bible. Nor would he, for some generations yet, be exercised in mind about the complete adequacy of the Bible to his needs ; it was an anchor which held. Yet when that perplexity did arise nearer to our own times, he was the less prepared to meet it because of the strict theory of scriptural infallibility which the Reformation had fastened upon him. This doctrine was not a simple inheritance from the mediaeval church or from the original reformers. Luther himself, though he would at times use language of extreme deference to the letter of scripture, would at other times employ the utmost freedom in discriminating between the books of the Bible, on wholly subjective and therefore unsatisfactory grounds, as when he rejects

the Epistle of St. James because it does not "speak Christ" to him. Calvin shewed rather the scholar's freedom, and by sheer intellectual perspicuity anticipated some of the findings of modern biblical learning. But the polemical need of the Reformed churches to find a doctrine of authority, that might replace and oppose the Catholic doctrine of the authority of the Church, drove them into an indiscriminating exaggeration of the authority of the Bible,¹ which would not stand the test of later ages, and would become in time a weakness and an embarrassment.

The wisest of the early reformers maintained a distinction in their use of the term, the Word of God, as including all God's means of revelation to men, and the Word of God contained in the scriptures. But this valuable distinction was soon ignored, and the Word of God was simply identified with the Bible. The Spirit of God might have ceased to speak to the spirit of man, except in

¹ Hort says (*Judaistic Christianity*, pp 2-3) that "the leading Reformers had themselves but an imperfect sense of the progress within Scripture," and comments adversely on their "treatment of all Scripture as in the same sense and the same manner authoritative."

subordinate fashion, since the canon of scripture was closed ; as if no fresh light could reach the human spirit save only by breaking out through the already written Word. There was need, then, for George Fox's protest, when he interrupted the preacher in the steeple-house, who was maintaining that it was the scriptures by which Christians were to test all truth.

“ Now the Lord's power was so mighty upon me, . . . that I could not hold, but was made to cry out and say, ‘ O no, it is not the scriptures ’ ; and I told them what it was, namely the Holy Spirit, by which the holy men of God gave forth the scriptures, whereby opinions, religions and judgments were to be tried ; for it led into all truth, and so gave the knowledge of all truth.” ¹

Fox's exegesis may have been at fault, but he had hold of an important truth, which had bearing on the future freedom of the Christian man, namely, that the Bible was not the final or absolute authority in religion, but the Spirit which both inspired the writers of the sacred books and still inspires and enlightens every man. His followers cannot be said to have yet cleared up the relation of their personal inspiration to the inspiration of

¹ *Journal*, anno 1649.

scripture, but at any rate they kept alive the belief in the continuing inspiration of the Divine Spirit in the hearts of men in every generation.

It has not been left to Quakers, Anabaptists, Independents, and Socinians alone to stand for Christian freedom, though their witness has been the most conspicuous and effective.¹ There has never been wanting within the Church of England also a continuous advocacy of a freer Christianity, a catena of protest against narrowing the membership of the church by insisting upon conditions which Christ did not require of his followers. The note of promise is already given in the first reformed Book of Common Prayer, where, after deprecating "the excessive multitude of ceremonies" which burdened men's consciences without cause, Archbishop Cranmer roundly says—"Christ's Gospel is not a ceremonial law (as much of Moses' law was), but it is a religion to serve God, not in bondage of the figure or shadow, but in the freedom of spirit."² That is a charter of a large liberty,

¹ See F. Ruffini's *Religious Liberty* for an account of the service of these Christian sects to the cause of freedom.

² *Of Ceremonies* (1549). From 1604 on, "of the spirit."

to which the church of our day may be recalled. The same reasonable temper is shewn in the most representative Anglican divine of the next generation. "Our end ought always to be the same," wrote Richard Hooker, "our ways and means thereunto not so."¹ He rebuts the Puritan contention that scripture ought to be the only rule of all our action and thinking with the plain common-sense view that scripture does not, and cannot, furnish guidance on the whole of human life, nor is it the only source of religious truth. Of the heavenly Wisdom he says

"As her ways are of sundry kinds, so her manner of teaching is not merely one and the same. Some things she openeth by the sacred books of Scripture; some things by the glorious works of Nature; with some things she inspireth them (*sc.* men) from above by spiritual influence; in some things she leadeth and traineth them only by worldly experience and practice. We may not so in any one special kind admire her, that we disgrace her in any other; but let all her ways be according unto their place and degree adored."

In unexpected places, too, we find the recognition that the simple truths of Christ's teaching are the most important. George

¹ *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Bk. iv., ch. ii. 3.

² *Ibid.* Bk. ii., ch. i. 4.

Herbert was one of those who, like Sir Thomas Browne, "love to keep the Road in Divinity," but in his poem *Divinitie* he contrasts the subtleties of theology with the plain commands of our Lord.

"Could not that wisdom, which first broacht the wine,
Have thicken'd it with definitions ?
And jagg'd his seamlesse coat, had that been fine,
With curious questions and divisions ?

But all the doctrine, which he taught and gave,
Was cleare as heav'n, from whence it came.
At least those beams of truth, which onely save,
Surpass in brightnesse any flame.

*Love God, and love your neighbour. Watch and pray.
Do as ye would be done unto.*
O dark instructions ; ev'n as dark as day !
Who can these Gordian knots undo ?"

Simplified

A large charitable temper, like Hooker's, is reflected in that typically English group which used to foregather at Lord Falkland's house at Great Tew—a university in little. Their enquiring minds were not turned to any serious criticism of the traditional theology of the creeds, nor was the material for such criticism available in that age, but they would have preferred not to go beyond the language of the New Testament to express the formal faith of the church. It is true also that men

like Chillingworth and Hales held, in a way that can no longer be held, that where scripture was clear the matter was for them settled; but they differed from the common protestant position in denying that scripture had determined everything; on many points it was silent, on others it was patient of diverse interpretations, and in like manner, they urged, the church also ought to be patient. They drew a needful distinction between fundamentals and non-fundamentals, and they would have cordially assented to Benjamin Whichcote's dictum that "vitals in religion are few." To allow less variety of Christian opinion and practice than is found in the New Testament was in their eyes an offence against charity and truth and a needless cause of division. "They are the greatest schismatics," says Chillingworth, "who make the way to heaven narrower, the yoke of Christ heavier, the differences of faith greater, the conditions of ecclesiastical communion harder and stricter than they were made at the beginning by Christ and his apostles."¹

¹ *The Religion of Protestants* (1638). Cp. Jeremy Taylor, who says men would do well to consider "whether of the two is the

“The ever-memorable Mr. John Hales of Eton College” has recorded his impressions of the Synod of Dort, which discussed the deep points of Calvinism. “There,” he said, “I bid John Calvin good night,”¹ but it was not to say good morning to Arminius, author of the rival system. Rather it set him wondering, now that he had had experience of church councils and had considered “the means how they are managed,” why churches, whether reformed or unreformed, attached such importance to the formal decisions of general councils. “It was never heard in any profession,” he writes, “that conclusion of truth

schismatic, he that makes unnecessary and (supposing the state of things) inconvenient impositions, or he that disobeys them because he cannot without doing violence to his conscience believe them; he that parts communion because without sin he could not entertain it, or they that have made it necessary for him to separate by requiring such conditions which to no man are simply necessary, and to his particular are either sinful or impossible” (*Liberty of Prophesying*, 1646, § 22, 1). It is to be regretted that neither Chillingworth nor Taylor maintained their earlier attitude without considerable qualifications. Dean Plumptre notices the deterioration in Chillingworth’s temper of mind (*Masters in English Theology*, p. 139 f.), and Bishop Heber says what can be said in excuse of Taylor’s inconsistency (*Life of Jeremy Taylor*, ed. Eden, p. xxxi. f.).

¹ *Golden Remains*, p. xiii. (Anthony Farindon’s prefatory letter). Cp. J. Tulloch, *Rational Theology in England in seventeenth century*, i. pp. 190, 1.

went by plurality of voices, the Christian profession only excepted ; and I have often mused how it comes to pass that the way which in all other sciences is not able to warrant the poorest conclusion, should be thought sufficient to give authority to conclusions in divinity.”¹ Hales held that the language of scripture was ambiguous on the dark matter of Reprobation, and therefore, he says, “ we seek out a way, not so much to establish an unity of opinion in the minds of all, which I take to be a thing likewise impossible, as to provide that multiplicity of conceit trouble not the Church’s peace. A better way my conceit cannot reach unto, than that we would be willing to think that these things, which with some shew of probability we deduce from Scripture, are at the best but *our opinions*,” instead of insisting upon them as “*necessary Truths*,” which (he says) is “one of the greatest causes which keep the churches this day so far asunder.”² “To charge churches and liturgies with things unnecessary was the first beginning of all

¹ *Works*, ed. Lord Hailes, 1765, i. pp. 65, 66.

² *Golden Remains*, p. 66.

superstition ; and when scruples of conscience began to be made or pretended, then schisms began to break in. . . . Meanwhile, where-soever false or suspected opinions are made a piece of the church-liturgy, he that separates is not the schismatic.”¹

The Cambridge Platonists, unlike the Great Tew circle, came from the Puritan wing of the church, and were less concerned with ecclesiastical issues : they sought rather to get above the battle into a serener air, as remote from the Savoy Conference as from the Westminster Assembly. They were single-minded and candid lovers of truth, and they believed in “ an eternal consanguinity between all verity ” : “ nothing is true in divinity which is false in philosophy.”² And under this latter term they included the rising natural sciences. Henry More of Christ’s College corresponded with Descartes, and followed the new studies with an intelligent sympathy.

¹ *Concerning Schism and Schismatics*, 1642, p. 15.

² *A Brief Account of the New Sect of Latitudinarians*, 1662, anon. (assigned in D.N.B. to Simon Patrick, afterwards Bishop of Ely). Reprinted in *The Phoenix*, ii. p. 317. Contrast the opinion of the famous humanist, Pietro Pomponazzi, that what was true in theology might be false in philosophy, and *vice versa* (Fawkes, *op. cit.* p. 59).

These Cambridge men were not afraid of calling their outlook and method rational. "Sir, I oppose not rational to spiritual," said Whichcote, "for spiritual is most rational." "He that will find truth," said John Smith of Emmanuel and Queens' Colleges, "must seek it with a free judgment and a sanctified mind." Superstition is the darkening of the divine intelligence in man: its true cause and rise is "nothing else but a false opinion" of "an angry Deity" whose "sourness and arbitrariness" little commend him to our faith. "A right knowledge of God would beget a freedom and liberty of soul within us, and not servility," "fear and flattery."¹ "Truth needs not at any time fly from reason, there being an eternal amity between them. They are only some private dogmas, that may well be suspected as spurious and adulterate, that dare not abide the trial thereof."²

Whichcote trusted to discover truth, not only by looking back to the scriptures, nor by looking within to his own heart, but also "by the actings of the Divine Spirit in the

¹ *Select Discourses*, Cambridge ed., pp. 26-28.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

minds of good men now alive I may learn more. . . . The times wherein I live are more to me than any else"—a sufficiently emphatic modernist faith.¹ He did not even regret the differences of honest men, for they are the means and the spur to the more perfect apprehension of truth. "If there were no contradictions in the several apprehensions of men, we might never be awakened to search into things, and so—if we were once in a mistake—we should never come out of it."² The spirit of religion, he held, is "a reconciling spirit"; therefore "it is in an unnatural use when it doth disunite"; but this unity of the spirit can never be founded upon doctrinal agreement, which is unattainable, but upon common moral sympathy. "All the differences in Christendom are about institutions, not about morals;" and yet, as he says, in a phrase which reminds us of Matthew Arnold's saying, "morals are nineteen parts in twenty of all religion."³

¹ *Letters*, ed. 1753, p. 116.

² *Works*, ii. 27.

³ *Aphorisms*, 586, 588, 712. Many more fine aphorisms are garnered in Tulloch, *op. cit.* vol. ii., chap. ii., and also in Bishop Westcott's lecture on Whichcote in *Religious Thought in the West*.

There were limitations and defects in the divinity of these Cambridge men ; they did not, perhaps could not in that age, adequately criticise the sources of Christian knowledge, their theological learning was uncritical, and their philosophy too reminiscent of Platonic tradition, yet to be in their company is to come nearer the light and freedom of Christ's Gospel than when one breathes the atmosphere of the Jerusalem Chamber or Convocation-house of their times.

A Restoration bishop, Herbert Croft of Hereford, published in 1675, it must be confessed without his name, a book called *The Naked Truth, or The True State of the Primitive Church*, in which he sought to recall the church to the freedom and simplicity of early days. "Oh, my fathers, my fathers, that should preach and practise the gospel of peace and love to your children, vouchsafe to read Romans xiv. See what great liberty that great Grandfather of the Church allows his children." "I pray remember the Treasurer to Candace, whom Philip instructed in the faith ; his time of catechising was very short, and soon proceeded to baptism. . . .

How? no more than this? . . . 'Tis not the quantity, but the quality of our faith God requireth."¹

At William III.'s accession there was an unsuccessful attempt to procure a relaxation of subscription and an optional use of certain ceremonies within the established church. Bishop Burnet among others laboured for what he called "a lessening of the tyranny of subscriptions" to articles of religion. "I have often marvelled," he writes to a Dutch theologian, "at the effrontery with which the Reformed Churches, to whom ecclesiastical infallibility is abhorrent, can require" such subscriptions; it is "a great imposition."² "Should there ever dawn a hope of reconciling the churches, the plan must be, not to endeavour after unity of opinion, which cannot be expected, but so to arrange that such as differ in opinion may live peaceably side by side."³

In a similar strain John Strype, the bio-

¹ Pp. 1, 17. Since the above paragraph was written, a reprint of this book has appeared, with an Introduction by the present Bishop of Hereford.

² T. E. S. Clarke and H. C. Foxcroft, *A Life of Gilbert Burnet*, p. 275; the Latin original of the letter is given on p. 503.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 276, 503, and *History of My Own Time (ad fin.)*.

grapher of Cranmer, breaks forth in a sermon, preached at Hackney in 1707 :—

“It is the misery of Christendom, that we should build too much upon articles of doctrine, upon opinions, tenets and systems ; and they must be subscribed to, sworn to, and believed : which causeth almost all the division of the Christian world. We are so earnest in asserting the orthodoxy of our own espoused doctrines, that we most lamentably fall out, break peace, lose charity, and wretchedly neglect the weightier matters, judgment, mercy and faith, and the practice of sincere truth and righteousness.”

We cannot fail to be struck by the close similarity of the language and outlook of writers representing many different generations and schools of thought.

There needs no more than a bare mention of the long struggle in the eighteenth century against subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles. In that acrimonious controversy we breathe a lower air than in the writers who have been hitherto discussed in this lecture. It should, however, be noticed that it was commonly in the name of fidelity to the inherent principles of the Reformation that the restrictions upon Christian freedom were opposed.¹

¹ *E.g.* Dr. Samuel Clarke said that at the Reformation “the doctrine of Christ and his apostles was again declared to be the only rule of truth, in which were contained all things necessary to faith and manners. And had that declaration constantly been adhered

Bishop Edmund Law of Carlisle, who bore a part in the struggle, has engraven upon his monument his testimony that a simple and uncorrupt religion cannot be had unless liberty be secured (*nisi salva libertate*).

Let the last witness be that of a layman, whose words are still read, while the contemporary divines are left unread. Edmund Burke had to defend himself in 1780 before the electors of his constituency for having supported, among other obnoxious measures, Sir George Savile's Bill for removing from the statute-book some of its gross penal restrictions against the Roman Catholics.¹ In his justly famous speech to the Bristol electors, Burke shewed how the Reformed Church, in the fierce struggles of the Reformation age, "became a persecutor in its turn." It would

to, . . . there had been possibly no more schisms in the Church of God, nor divisions of any considerable moment among Protestants" (*The Scriptural Doctrine of the Trinity*, Introduction, 1712).

Archdeacon Francis Blackburne asks, "Can you require assent to a certain sense of Scripture, exclusive of other senses, without an unwarrantable interference with those rights of private judgment, which are manifestly secured to every individual by the Scriptural terms of Christian liberty, and thereby contradicting the original principles of the Protestant Reformation?" (*The Confessional*, 1766, anon., p. 50).

¹ Savile's London house was burnt by the mob in the Gordon riots (June, 1780).

be long, he said, before the spirit of true piety and true wisdom, involved in the principles of the Reformation, could be depurated from the dregs and feculence of the contention with which it was carried through. "However, until this be done, the Reformation is not complete ; and those who think themselves good Protestants, from their animosity to others, are in that respect no Protestants at all." ¹ "The Reformation is not complete" ; it was an arrested movement ; even its leaders were soon afraid of its own principles, and took refuge in the old authoritarian methods. They thought to protect their new-found liberties with an armoury of new-made definitions and with ecclesiastical penalties of the old kind. But there never has been wanting a due succession of loyal sons within our own borders who have seen and have declared that the Reformation is not complete, nor can be until the freedom of the Christian man is assured to him within the Church of Christ, from which the spirit of bondage shall have been expelled, that the spirit of sonship may prevail.

¹ *The Works of Edmund Burke*, Bohn's ed. ii. pp. 144-5.

LECTURE IV
THE CHURCH IN BONDAGE

SYNOPSIS

THE church of the nineteenth century has not shewn itself friendly to the cause of freedom, social, intellectual or spiritual.

Its excessive reliance upon "the tradition of the elders" is in damaging contrast with the freedom of criticism which the scientific method has introduced into all modern studies. Even in literature, where the supreme achievements lie in the past, the claims of orthodox tradition have often proved mischievous. The kind of authority universally approved, contrasted with the special kind of authority which is still often claimed for the past decisions of the church.

It is not enough for the Christian to achieve personal freedom, he needs to enjoy it within the Christian society, for the fellowship of believers is a necessary part of the full Christian life. The church should be a fellowship in the exploration of Christian faith and life. That fellowship is unduly narrowed and embarrassed by the church's insistence on the definitions of the past.

There is a limit to the legitimacy of symbolical interpretation of the creeds, and its adoption does not inspire confidence. Interest of the laity in the question, as affecting the supply and quality of the ministry.

Bearing of the question also on the conditions of Christian Unity. No intellectual agreement is to be expected. Why look for any other basis of unity than the confession of discipleship? "What Christ never insisted upon, neither let us insist upon."

LECTURE IV

THE CHURCH IN BONDAGE

For freedom did Christ set us free. GAL. v. 1, R.V. mg.

FOR freedom did Christ set us free, yet the Churches of Christ are everywhere in chains. Confessions and articles of faith, Acts of Uniformity and trust-deeds, traditions and conventions, still exercise an unnatural and untimely control over the thought and practice of the Churches of the twentieth century; especially they constrain those who, as prophet and priest, are influencing the religious thought of others.

The decisions of earlier days, to which "we were not consenting parties," are made the criteria of the thoughts of to-day, so that the past unduly rules the present. Jowett complained that "in religion we are always returning to the past, instead of starting from the past; . . . trying to force

back modern thought into the old conditions instead of breathing anew the spirit of Christ into an altered world.”¹ So much attention is given to what “was said to them of old time,” that little is available to heed “what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

The same timidity which has marked the religious thinking of Christians has extended to their thinking on moral and social problems. There is, indeed, a noble love of political freedom in the tradition of Puritanism and Nonconformity, yet organised churches, whether established or free, had before the nineteenth century commonly “drifted into the position of defenders of the existing social and political order.”² It is strange that Robert Hall, soon after coming to Cambridge in 1791 as minister of the Baptist Church, should need to maintain in a sermon, which attracted wide notice, that Christianity is “consistent with a love of freedom.” The true Church of Christ should have been conspicuous for its love of freedom, and known of all men for its championship of freedom.

¹ *Biographical Sermons*, p. 53.

² Bartlet and Carlyle, *op. cit.* p. 541.

Yet it could not be maintained without paradox that the Church of England, for instance, was a liberating force in Robert Hall's time or for several generations after. Thomas Mozley wrote, with perhaps too much sharpness but with substantial truth, that it was "politically and indissolubly leagued with all the worst causes in our social state. . . . You have only to recall anything that was bad in our system and in our customs," in the eighteenth century and some way into the nineteenth, "and the Church of England was in political league with it."¹ Individual Churchmen played a leading and honourable part in the movements for the abolition of the slave-trade, for the mitigating of the evils of the industrial system, for the protection of child-labour, and later for the emancipation of women; but they commonly found the official leaders and the rank and file of the Church apathetic or even hostile. Only when the battles were won was the Church clearly on the side of emancipation; it was wise after the event, and partly, it must be allowed, in its own interest. We may thankfully

¹ *The Creed or a Philosophy*, p. 267.

recognise the changed attitude of the Church to-day,¹ and yet not be surprised that the confidence of the classes which received so little support in the time of their oppression is not readily given to the Church now. No man of religious feeling can read without searching of heart the chapters in Mr. and Mrs. Hammond's book, *The Town Labourer*, on the Conscience of the Rich and the Spirit of Religion. In the face of degrading conditions of life, which are now universally condemned and largely ameliorated, the characteristic message of religious teachers was Resignation; "the present state of things is very short,"² and eternity will redress the inevitable evils of the present. Some, like William Wilberforce and Paley, with greater hardihood, maintained that "the poor have the advantage,"³ as being exempt from the greater temptations of the rich, whose apparent advantages are unreal. Christianity, as thus understood, "was not a standard by

¹ As evidenced, for instance, in the Report of the Archbishops' Committee on Christianity and Industrial Problems (1918).

² W. Wilberforce, *Practical View of Christianity* (1798), p. 314, *cit. ap.* J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, p. 232.

³ *Ibid.*

which to judge the institutions of society, but a reason for accepting them.”¹ There were many noble lives of philanthropy, inspired by religious feeling, but there was no general sense of its being a Christian’s duty to ensure decent conditions of life for the less fortunate. A working-class reformer, imprisoned in 1812, and given the Bible to read, discovered for himself the wide difference between the attitude of the religious people of his day and that of the Hebrew prophets towards social wrongs.² Nor was it the Church of England only that stood so complacently by the established order; Cobbett complained that Methodists might declaim against the West Indian slave-holders, “but not a word do you ever hear from them against the slave-holders in Lancashire and in Ireland.”³ If the

¹ Hammond, p. 225. Reference is made on p. 233 to W. Paley, *Reasons for Contentment addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public* (1793).

² *Ibid.*, p. 305.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 282, citing Cobbett’s *Political Register*, Jan. 3, 1824. The authors, in the following pages, amply recognise the good influence of Methodism in bringing comfort and self-respect to poor people living under hard conditions; “by the life and energy and awakening that it brought to this oppressed society, it must, in spite of itself, have made many men better citizens, and some even better rebels” (p. 287).

religious leaders of the Church of England and of Nonconformity had spoken out as the Hebrew prophets did, they could hardly have failed to stir the conscience of the upper and middle classes, whose ear they still had, and then the pace of reform would have been quickened.

And as it has been with social, so it has been with intellectual emancipation. So far as it has been effected, it has been rather in spite of the Church than with its encouragement. The Church has preferred "blind Authority beating with his staff" to a candid appeal to the reason. Dr. Hort's grave words are amply justified by the record of the Christian Churches in the nineteenth century :

"There can be no surer sign of decrepitude and decay in faith than a prevalent nervousness about naming and commending reason, an unwillingness to allude to its existence except under wrappings of language which suggest that it is but a necessary evil. The fear of doing injury to the unstable by a bolder policy is perversely fallacious. The faith of ordinary people would be far more clear and sure if they had been freely instructed in the responsibilities of reason. Our present cowardice moreover is of modern growth."¹

The characteristic fearlessness of Christ invites

¹ *Hulsean Lectures, Notes and Illustrations*, p. 176.

comparison with the timidity of Christians. The religion of Christ is not merely consistent with the love of freedom, it is incompatible with bondage to "the tradition of the elders." Such bondage, too, is in plain contrast with the nature of authority as it is understood to-day in all other departments of human thought. It is proving increasingly difficult to justify a kind of authority in the province of religious thinking which would be disallowed in other provinces. The finality attributed by many Christians to the definitions of the past has no parallel in other fields of modern study; and the absence of finality, so far from discouraging the pursuit of knowledge in those fields, has been a perpetual spur to achieve better knowledge and more satisfactory definition. There is a true place for authority, and a true reverence for the thinkers of the past, but the truest reverence to their memory is felt to consist, not in accepting their conclusions as dogmatic, but in carrying on their spirit to new issues. No one could have been present in Cambridge at the centenary celebration of Charles Darwin's birth without perceiving both the

reverence for his work and the undercurrent of frank criticism concerning his most famous theories. Nor, we believe, would Darwin have had it otherwise. "Science," as Sir John Seeley wrote, "dissents without scruple from those whom it reverences most, and . . . the most eminent members of" its professions "encourage this freedom." He contrasts this attitude with "the excessive reverence for the opinions of famous men" in theology.¹

The scientific mind and method have pervaded every province of human enquiry; slowly, yet surely, they have affected the common mind of our generation. There is a new sensitiveness to truth, a new conviction of the value of truth, a new eagerness to use approved methods only for the discovery of truth. For instance, anything in religion which claims to be a historical fact must be submitted to the same rigorous and scientific historical method as any alleged fact of secular history. Such examination does not itself give religion, but it gives the data which the religious mind is called to interpret.

¹ *Natural Religion*, pp. 6, 7.

The study of theology has become increasingly scientific, and its academic exponents have long recognised the value of that stricter method, but the Church at large is slow to recognise it and still appeals with undue assurance to the authority of the past, with the result of disparaging the authority of the scholars of the present.

“The essence of religion,” said Schleiermacher, “is neither thought nor action, but intuition and feeling.”¹ And here it has closer analogy to literature than to science. In literature, as in religion, there is appropriately a greater regard for tradition than in science. The value of the past for us has been felicitously expressed in Professor Gilbert Murray’s recent book, *Religio Grammatici*. So far from the past being our bondage, it effects our liberation; it is our escape from being imprisoned in the external present; it leaves us “standing in the present, but in a present so enlarged and enfranchised that it is become not a prison but a free world.”² To the scholar “the past is the past only by

¹ Quoted in Bartlet and Carlyle, *op. cit.* p. 580.

² *Religio Grammatici*, p. 8.

the accident of time. . . . What he seeks in the past . . . is eternity."¹ Equally of the poet and of the religious genius may be said what Wordsworth said of Burns

"Deep in the general heart of men
His power survives."

But it needs something of the scholar's knowledge and historic sense to understand the past, and enter into its thought, and distinguish the abiding truth from its contemporary expression.² The scholar can apprehend the underlying and eternal religious significance of articles in a creed, which in their literal and superficial meaning perplex a plain man who is not at home in the thought of the fourth century. The latter, partly because of his

¹ From *A Scholar's Religion*, an article on Professor Murray's book in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Aug. 8, 1918. Cp. *Religio Grammatici*, pp. 24, 47.

² This delicate task could hardly be performed with better qualifications or with more success than it is by Professor J. F. Bethune-Baker in his recent book, *The Faith of the Apostles' Creed*. He rightly criticises the ambiguous term "symbolical interpretation," and is himself concerned to lay bare "what is the religious conviction, the spiritual reality, to which the literal statement" of each article of the creed "points." It must surely be allowed that his own interpretation of the faith retains the "values" of the ancient creeds, but he recognises that those creeds are "ill fitted for the purpose of expressing clearly the essential convictions (whether intellectual, moral or spiritual) of a Christian" (pp. xxi., 32).

defective historic sense and imagination, is apt to ask why his faith must still be expressed in the thought and terms of an earlier day. He will more readily recognise the value of past expression in the language of prayer and praise than in the language which professes to give an intellectual and precise presentment of his faith.

In literature, as in religion, the claims of orthodox tradition are easily exaggerated. The attitude of the old *Edinburgh Review* to the Romantic Poets at the beginning of last century is not unlike the attitude of the orthodox to revision in theology, and the same kind of reason is advanced against change. "Poetry," wrote Francis Jeffrey, "has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago by certain inspired writers whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question."¹ According to him, the poets of the preceding ten or twelve years were "dissenters from the established systems in poetry and criticism," and "seem to value themselves very highly for having broken loose from the bondage of

¹ *Edinburgh Review*, Oct., 1802, art. "Thalaba the Destroyer."

ancient authority." Yet, as we see with the advantage of a longer perspective, Wordsworth was in the true succession to Milton and other of his great predecessors in the English poetic tradition, although to his contemporary critics he and his brother poets seemed chiefly conspicuous for breaking with inherited canons of poetry and criticism.

The subsequent acceptance of the innovating poet reveals another analogy to what happens in the case of the innovating religious reformer :
" The prophet at first is reviled, or despised, or merely neglected. Then he finds disciples, who, though they understand his teaching but imperfectly, and see his vision but obscurely, yet in their partial understanding and partial insight are strong enough to move the world. But the original impulse weakens as it spreads ; the living passion is petrified in codes and creeds ; the revelation becomes a commonplace ; and so the religion that began in vision ends in orthodoxy. . . . The cry of revolt from the old order becomes the watchword of authority under a new order, which in all essential respects differs but little from the old. The history of the apprecia-

tion of any great poet exhibits itself, therefore, like the history of religion, in a series of revivals.”¹ The desire to get “back to Christ” has led to a closer attention to the earlier Gospels, and to something like a re-discovery of the Christ that stands behind the Gospels. The more that men have recognised the true lineaments of the historic Christ, his outlook on life, his sense of values and the proportion of his teaching, the more they have been disturbed by the contrast which these afford with the outlook and emphasis of teaching in the existing Christian Church. The breadth of his sympathies, the untheological simplicity of his teaching, his comparative unconcern about the external forms of religion, and his courageous disregard of tradition make ever clearer the unlikeness of the contemporary Church to its Master.

The hope of Christianity is that Christ himself does not disappoint; the warning to the Church is that it is not Christian enough to attract those who are already attracted to Christ. Many Christians, both inside and outside our churches, will endorse

¹ Sir W. Raleigh, *Wordsworth*, pp. 224, 225.

what an Army Chaplain has written about soldiers who have found faith in Christ during the War.

Church and "They do not find organised Christianity an even approximately adequate presentation of Christ and His discipleship, and they regard the Church at large as misrepresenting Him and a traitor to Him and His Spirit, where it should portray Him. As they see us, we are levitically scrupulous over ecclesiastical issues whose significance they have not comprehended, but negligent over what seem to them the weightier matters, such as a passionate pursuit of righteousness in national life, justice for the oppressed, and valorous goodwill." ¹

The complaints of young and inexperienced men in the Army cannot be accepted without reserve, but the indictment, which Mr. Brough makes in their name, is sufficiently near the truth to find support among men in middle years and in civilian life. The Christian Church is unlike Christ in its disproportionate emphasis upon the external duties of religion, in its insistence on doctrinal tests, in the predominantly negative tone of its moral counsels, and in its restricted sympathies. The Christian faith is made to appear too much like a closed system of thought and practice,

¹ J. S. B. Brough, art. "Religion in the Army," *Church Quarterly Review*, April, 1918, p. 33. Mr. Brough died shortly before the signing of the Armistice.

too little like Cranmer's definition of it as "a religion to serve God in the freedom of spirit."

It may be a painful, but it is a salutary discipline, to read Sir John Seeley's description in general terms of "the original man's destiny," and to ask ourselves how far that description is true of what has overtaken the Prophet of Nazareth in the institution which bears his name.

"He broke the chains by which men were bound; he threw open to them the doors leading into the boundless freedom of nature and truth. But in the next generation *he* is idolised, and nature and truth are as much forgotten as ever; if he could return to earth, he would find that the crowbars and files with which he made his way out of the prison-house have been forged into the bolts and chains of a new prison called by his own name. And who are those who idolise his memory? Who are found building his sepulchre? Precisely the same party which resisted his reform; those who are born for routine and can accommodate themselves to everything but freedom." ¹

Yet, when all is said that must be said, the Church of Christ is something better than a prison-house; in it and through it, from tenderest years, men and women have drawn much which is dearest to them in life, and not

¹ *Ecce Homo*, ch. xxi.

lightly would they break with it and its associations. In leaving it, they might win freedom, and lose something as valuable, fellowship in Christ. For, though the sense of fellowship in the Church is often disappointingly feeble, it is a true part of the Christian Way of Life. The Tractarian movement did good service to English religion in recovering the idea of the Church, even if some of its representatives unduly narrowed it in thought and in practice.¹ As it is not private but social salvation which is the true Christian goal, the individual follower of Christ needs the Church, and the Church needs him.

The Church must ensure to its members, so far as ever it can, "the intellectual liberty which is essential to all living minds,"² while the members on their part should be willing to give way to the will of the society up to the farthest point which their intellectual honesty allows. At that point conscience forbids assent, but in all lesser matters they will not wish to be contentious. In order to

¹ For an appreciation of the service rendered by the Tractarians, from a writer of a different school of thought, see H. Rashdall, *Christus in Ecclesia*, pp. 3-30.

² Denney, *op. cit.* Preface to 4th ed., p. 10.

remain within the Christian fellowship, they would "come under the law like one of themselves" (1 Cor. ix. 20). Gladly would they keep touch with the classic devotions of the Church, its prayers and hymns and ordered ceremonial. The language of hymns, for instance, will allow of a wide variety of interpretation; it is symbolical, and comes under a well understood permission of poetic licence; it is the language of religious emotion rather than of formal belief.¹ The same is hardly less true of the liturgical prayers and of the public reading of the scriptures. As plain matter of fact, most Christians take them home to their hearts in their own way, and are not required to interpret them in any prescribed way.

But it is otherwise with the creeds

¹ I have in mind, not only the popular hymns of recent origin, but also the Gospel canticles and the classical hymns of the Church, such as *Te Deum*, *Gloria in excelsis*, *Vexilla Regis*, *Dies Irae*, and the like. The same is true, in an even higher degree, of the parables of Jesus and of much else in the Bible. As Mr. Edmond Holmes says: "Poetry is the language of inspiration, the language which true and deep emotion finds for itself. . . . The virtue of poetry, as the instrument of deep feeling and high thinking, lies in this, that it says many things to many men and so leaves each man free to interpret its message for himself." (*The Secret of the Cross*, p. 68).

which are nothing if not a definite confession of faith in set terms. It has been said that, while politicians mostly leave loopholes, theologians take care not to do so; the framers of creeds have been concerned to be precise beyond a doubt of their meaning, and history can generally recover the original intention of those who made them. The claim is often made that the individual churchman of to-day, whether clergyman or layman, is entitled to put any interpretation that the words can fairly bear on the clauses of the creeds, without too narrow regard for their primary or historical meaning. Without disputing that claim, it is well to recognise that there is a limit to the usefulness and legitimacy of what is called symbolical or figurative interpretation of the creeds.¹ What Dr. Den-

¹ Cp. Nowell Smith, "*Where is your Faith?*" p. 43: "It is one thing to employ symbols consciously as symbols to meet the need of emotion to express the ineffable, as Jesus Christ did, and as every poet and prophet has done, and as we all must do in accordance with our spiritual needs and capacities; it is another thing to freeze symbol into dogma, which is the way in which—perhaps inevitably—the Church has to so large an extent frozen the healing streams of Christ's teaching; and it is yet another thing to play Mr. Facing-both-ways, to try to teach as dogma what you really hold as symbol. And this last is the false position imposed upon the teacher by the obsolete, but still official, language of our Church."

ney says of the Westminster Confession and the Thirty-nine Articles is equally true of the Catholic creeds, that, while they are retained as conditions of ministry, men are "tempted to strain them into meaning what they were not intended to mean, so as to make subscription less of a burden to conscience."¹ Instead of the figurative method being a solution, by which the creeds can be retained in use by those who accept and by those who refuse them in their historical meaning, it gives no security to those who hold by the old meaning, while it is a doubtfully ingenuous expedient for those who desire to give the words a new meaning.² After all, the meaning put upon the words is more important than the words, which are only counters. It is a temporary and unsatisfactory method,

¹ *Op. cit.* 388. On the failure of similar symbolical treatment of pagan religious beliefs, see K. Lake, *The Stewardship of Faith*, p. 111: "The public ear is never kept by any one who has constantly to stop in order to explain that what he is saying is only symbolically true, when the language in which it is expressed was clearly intended literally by those who first made use of it. . . . When a "sacred history"—which is what Plutarch's mythology was—has come to mean everything which the preacher wishes, it has also come to mean nothing, and his audience leaves him in the end for those who say so."

² See Additional Note, p. 149.

which is not calculated to bring to those who use it the confidence either of those liberal Christians outside the churches who agree with their general position, or of those inside who are prepared to tolerate the membership of those who differ from them in the same society. It were far better to remove the necessity or the excuse for the use of any expedients which are even dubious. "The one grace," said Martineau, "which the Church seems never to reach, is veracity." "But, for a teacher, veracity is the essential grace: the Church must reach it, or she must die."¹

It is sometimes suggested that the laity, at any rate, are left free, that no test questions are asked of them, and that they can and do join in the worship of their Church on their own terms, which they need not to make public. Certainly many of the conforming laity are indifferent to the theological and ecclesiastical issues discussed by the clergy, or, when they consciously differ from the prevailing clerical view, they keep their difference to themselves, from modesty or for the

¹ Fawkes, *op. cit.* p. 76.

sake of peace ; they are of "the religion of all sensible men—that which I tell no one." But in recent generations the laity have fortunately become more articulate. An interesting chapter in the history of religion has yet to be written on the lay interpretation of the Christian faith. In spite of some inevitable amateurishness and vagueness, it would reveal certain common characteristics amid much diversity of expression, and it would, in some respects at least, come nearer to the mind of Jesus, himself a layman, than do the scribes of the Christian Church. The layman's conception of religion is strongly ethical rather than doctrinal, and his faith is a personal trust in God rather than a trust in the ordinances of religion. To go no further back than the last century, Christianity owes real illumination to such lay-writers as Coleridge and T. H. Green, Mazzini and Tolstoi and Ruskin, Erskine of Linlathen and Matthew Arnold and Arnold Toynbee, Seeley and Seebohm. Coleridge, indeed, is commonly as metaphysical as any divine, but another and a simpler side of his religious interest is seen in his posthumous *Confessions of an Enquiring*

Spirit, which anticipates the modern attitude to the Bible, and at the same time shews a tender regard for the religion of "cottage dames." Arnold Toynbee, in *A Leaflet for Working Men*, urged the need of greater intellectual freedom for the clergy, as one of the two reforms most indispensable for the future welfare of the Church of England.¹

For it is not enough for the layman to be himself free; he too suffers from the restriction that he and his family can be ministered to by those only who have subscribed to confessions of faith or trust-deeds, and by those mainly who have been trained for the ministry in theological colleges where orthodoxy is vigilantly guarded. If the layman desires, as he often most sincerely desires, that his children should grow up in attachment to the Church, he must, as things are, submit to their being taught, in school and confirmation-class, from the pulpit and from the unrevised Prayer-book, a faith which he thinks narrower and more ecclesiastical than Christ's. If, in his anxiety to save them from what is

¹ This paper and other extracts from Toynbee's writings, expressing his religious thought, are collected at the end of the later editions of his *Industrial Revolution*.

obsolete and unworthy, he is at pains to teach his children what he believes to be a nobler conception of God, and a faith which more nearly represents the best Christian thought of our day, he runs the risk of seeing that teaching cancelled, or set in a conflict which he would rather avoid, by what they will hear read and taught in Church. The difficulty is already acutely felt in many homes, where there is a real desire to retain old and valued links with the life and worship of the Church. It is, therefore, the layman's interest to make it clear whether it is his wish that the ministry should continue to be restricted to those who can give assent to the old formulae. The Hebrew prophets did not hesitate to criticise freely the ideas and practices of the current religion; the Church of Christ needs prophets as well as priests, and prophets must be free to speak "what the Lord hath given them to speak."

The question of subscription to creeds has also an important bearing on the problem of Christian unity. Those of us who have reached middle life can hardly measure the intensity of the desire in the younger generation of

Christians for a vastly extended improvement in the relation and co-operation of Christian churches. The younger men and women have found that they can join in conference and common worship with those who have grown up with different religious associations and attachments. They have found the way less beset with difficulties than their elders had supposed ; both in the Student Christian Movement and in the Army, they have discovered spiritual affinities and the possibilities of religious fellowship across the existing barriers. They regard the Church as a fellowship in the exploration of Christian faith and life, rather than as an organisation for perpetuating an inherited theology and a stereotyped worship. Within that fellowship they wish to share their differing experiences, and reach out in new experiments of life and worship. In the atmosphere of a conference, sustained by common prayer and friendly intercourse, they are not afraid of differences of opinion ; rather, they look for the frankest expression of differences as the best hope of discovering the underlying unity, or, when their differences are irreconcilable, of seeing

them in a truer perspective. They would generally assent to the spirit of Miss Maude Royden's question: "What differences *can* be fundamental between those who love and follow Christ?"¹

The history of the long past, and still more of the recent past, should convince us that no intellectual agreement among the disciples of Christ is to be expected. Our age is not only incompetent to revise or rewrite the creeds, it even questions the rightfulness of a formula as a test of membership. "Let us not deceive ourselves," wrote Principal John Tulloch, "unity can never come from dogma, as our forefathers unhappily imagined. Dogma splits rather than unites from its very nature. It is the creature of intellect, and the intellect can never rest. It remains unsatisfied with its own work, and is always turning up afresh the soil of past opinion. The spirit of Christ can alone bind together the fragments of Truth, as they mirror themselves in our partial reason."² "The witness of the

¹ *The Hour and the Church*, p. 18.

² *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century*, p. 335.

Church," says Dr. Robert Mackintosh, "has been splintered by sectarianism—partly through man's sin, partly through the demand for an impossible unity in creed and ritual. . . . That error is essentially an excrescence, and need not be permanent."¹ Why seek for unity in anything else but a confessed discipleship of Christ? The Church of Christ has no right, indeed, to ask for less, but has it the right to ask for more?

"If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" and conversely, if any man have the spirit of Christ, we should not be content with any restriction that debarred him from our fellowship. Edward Caird, in a lay-sermon to the members of Balliol College, said that in our times "the great truths are separating themselves from the little ones, the eternal verities of the divine life in man from the passing phases and adjuncts of human tradition." In religion, in particular,

"men have learnt—or may easily learn—in this generation, that the one thing necessary is not dogmatic correctness, but devotion to the cause of God and humanity; and that however important it is that our thoughts about

¹ *Christ and the Jewish Law*, p. 190.

God, about Christ, about the relations of God to man, and of man to God, should be as adequate as we can make them, yet the root of the matter lies in the spirit of Christ, and not in doctrines about Him ; in the living realisation of the nearness of our finite life to the infinite, and not in the theological exactness of our creed ; or at least, that the latter is valuable just so far as, and no further than it shows itself in the former.”¹

“ By their fruits shall ye know them,” is the criterion of Christ. “ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Many who are outside the Church have wondered why it has chiefly emphasised other tests than Christ’s. “ Why is it,” asked Spinoza, “ that Christians differ from others, not in faith or charity or any of the fruits of the spirit, but only in opinion ? ” And Leigh Hunt relates that, in his last conversation with his friend Shelley, the poet “ assented warmly to an opinion I expressed in the cathedral at Pisa, that a truly divine religion might yet be established, if charity were really made the principle of it, instead of faith.”² It is an untried way, and it has its risks ; but we know too by now the risks that have attended the way of compulsion

¹ *Lay Sermons*, pp. 191, 194.

² J. Addington Symonds, *Shelley*, p. 176.

all through the Christian centuries. The Society of Friends has come nearest to realising the way of freedom, and is known of all men for the fruits of the spirit which it has borne. It was a characteristic of the Methodist movement in its wonderful early years, and John Wesley "particularly insisted on the circumstance," that "the Methodists alone do not insist on your holding this or that opinion, but they think and let think. Now I do not know any other religious society, either ancient or modern, wherein such liberty of conscience is now allowed since the age of the Apostles. Here is our glorying; and a glorying peculiar to us."¹

Such should be the glorying of a truly Catholic Church of Christ, that it consciously and persistently aims at a unity in diversity of "all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ with never diminishing love."² Common

¹ *Journal*, May 18, 1788. It is a melancholy comment on these noble words that, 131 years after they were written, Methodism should still adhere to the Forty-four Sermons and Notes of John Wesley as a doctrinal standard. But the Report of the committee, presided over by Dr. Workman, which was substantially accepted, after a whole day's discussion, at the Pastoral Session of the Conference of 1919, at any rate insisted on the right of the living church to interpret its own standards.

² Thayer-Grimm's interpretation of the difficult phrase translated by R. V. 'in uncorruptness.' Eph. vi. 24.

devotion to the one Master is the true bond of unity. Willing discipleship is worth more as the condition of membership in Christ's Church than hesitatingly qualified assent to conditions which are more and more widely felt to be none of Christ's making. "What Christ never insisted upon," said Jowett, "neither let us insist upon."

There is the more cause that the Church should not insist, when it is a question of opinion rather than of knowledge. It may be said in fairness to those who in the past framed creeds and confessions of faith, that they believed they had knowledge. They were relying on what they believed to be an infallible record of unquestionable history, and they deduced from it their "systems of consequential divinity."¹ If, as a result of a more rigorous historical method, which they did not possess for no fault of their own, we are compelled, often against our wish and our interest, to question what they regarded as established, it would be presumption on our part, which it was not on theirs, to draw

¹ A phrase used by John Jortin, and repeated by Bishop Edmund Law in *Considerations on the Propriety of requiring Subscription to Articles of Faith* (1774).

deductions from Scripture with the same logical precision that they used, still more to impose them on other men's consciences. Besides, as is now universally recognised, before the scientific era the deductive method was used to excess; and it is wise to remember that, if the premisses are imperfect, the more rigorously we draw the conclusion, the further we are likely to be from the truth.¹ The warning of the late Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford, which had immediate reference to the insoluble controversy about the nature of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, is plainly capable of larger reference:—

“ May we not think that the direst offence a man can commit against the unity of the Church is to define what God has not defined, and to restrict Christian liberty by adding to the conditions of salvation? It is always dangerous to confuse the provinces of opinion and knowledge. Even in our own minds it is a moral duty to avoid this error. If there is anything about which we are not certain, we ought not to pretend that it is otherwise; for this is intellectual dishonesty. The next degree of aberration is to persuade yourself that what is uncertain is certain; and this is superstition. The third and worst is to bind these false certainties by penalties of any kind on the consciences of other men; this is tyranny.”²

¹ Cp. Fawkes, *op. cit.* pp. 294, 376.

² C. Bigg, *Wayside Sketches of Ecclesiastical History*, p. 178.

After all, it is the mind of Christ that we are more concerned to respect than the tradition of the elders. And that mind was clearly not exclusive but broadly human. Discipleship was for all who had faith enough to follow him. The standard for Christ's Church is Christ's standard: we may "draw no narrower limits than those traced by the hand of the Son of man: *Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.*"¹ Within this wider fellowship, based on freedom and charity, each in charity will respect the freedom of others. For the sake of continuity with the Christian past, those who feel most the pressure of the present will cherish every link of association with the past, that conscience will allow; for the sake of fellowship with living Christians, they will be patient of wide differences in belief and mode of worship. They will not ask their fellow-Christians to surrender any belief or practice which is precious to them. They do not suppose themselves to have all the truth, nor their own preferred way of worship to be the

¹ Fairbairn, *op. cit.* p. 548.

only way, or even the best way—except for them. “Uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum.”¹ They are for excluding none, they desire themselves not to be excluded for any defect of belief, so long as they still look to Christ for the inspiration of their lives. Is such unconditioned fellowship in Christ dangerous and impracticable? or is it, though venturesome, the true Christian aim which shall find its fulfilment so soon as the spirit of Christ possesses the hearts of all his followers?

¹ From the Report of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, as Prefect of the City, to the Emperor Valentinian II., A.D. 384. *Cit. ap. Ruffini, op. cit.* p. 33.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON THE INTERPRETATION
OF CERTAIN CLAUSES IN THE APOSTLES'
CREED.

MUCH discussion has been current in recent years about the limits of permissible interpretation of the Apostles' Creed. I take here, for an example, the words "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," not because of their special importance, but because they are the clearest example of the difficulty of giving to words of the Creed a different explanation from that which they naturally bear. Some Christian scholars would argue that to make these words equivalent to a confession of faith in the Incarnation of our Lord is not to give them a new meaning, as I have suggested (page 135), but to give them their essential religious value. With much deference to the scholarship and personal character of those who urge this view, I find myself unhappily precluded from agreeing with them for the following considerations.

1. It is clearly not the primary and intended meaning of the second clause. I must assent to the Bishop of Ely's statement: "Beyond all dispute these words are a categorical affirmation that our Lord, without the intervention of a human father, was born of

Virgin birth

a Virgin.”¹ Professor Bethune-Baker also says: “Human paternity was always intended to be excluded;”² and he further points out that in early credal forms the word Virgin stood alone without the personal name Mary, which was introduced later. “The Virgin,” therefore, cannot be taken as a mere title, serving to identify the Mary who is known to tradition as the Virgin Mary, but is an explicit statement of her virginity at the time of Christ’s birth.

2. Bishop Chase continues: “When these words are ‘symbolically interpreted,’ this affirmation is denied.” It might be objected that few churchmen actually deny the affirmation. Not only is it graceless to deny what is precious to the faith of fellow-Christians, but it is also strictly illegitimate to deny what can be neither proved nor disproved. But for myself I do not want to take advantage of the plea that I do not deny; “suspension of judgment” seems to me a meiosis to describe any who, like myself, have virtually reached a decision that the miraculous birth is both improbable and unessential to the faith of a Christian. I hold, therefore, that I am in conscience disallowed from affirming it. But I

¹ *Belief and Creed*, p. 170.

² *The Faith of the Apostles’ Creed*, p. 97, note.

speak only for myself ; in the general interests of the Church, I desire that, so long as the recitation of the Creed is obligatory, others who feel themselves justified in affirming these clauses should be expressly sanctioned to affirm them as a symbol of their faith in the Incarnation.

3. But, if the clauses are taken to mean "the spiritual truth" of the Incarnation, they are ill-suited for that purpose. The phrase "born of the Virgin Mary" is an unsatisfactory way of affirming anything except that which it so clearly says, namely, that Jesus Christ was born of a Virgin, whose name was Mary. If the intention of the Church, now or at any other time, is to convey a deeper and more essential truth, of which the Virgin Birth is the symbol, it is surely possible to express that truth more directly and with less risk of misunderstanding. A statement, which is meant to be serviceable to plain folk, must say what it means and mean what it says. It is idle to expect that the categorical statement, that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, is likely to mean, or even ought to mean, to the ordinary Church-goer anything but what it quite clearly says. The perpetual resort to apology and explanation as to the real meaning of the Church is as exasperating as it is ineffectual.

4. It is generally admitted that practically all instructed Christians to-day interpret *some* clauses of the Apostles' Creed in a metaphorical or symbolical sense. The principle, once admitted, will not be arrested permanently at the point where Bishop Gore desires to arrest it.¹ But, so far from being satisfied at the prospect of an indefinite extension of symbolical interpretation, I regard the whole process as leading us further and further from reality in our use of words. The atmosphere of unreality already hangs heavy over our traditional Church language, and to increase the margin of this unreality will not put us straight with the world, which already thinks we have more than enough of it. Some use of metaphor and symbol is inevitable in attempting to define the indefinable, but the Apostles' Creed, with its characteristically Western matter-of-fact statements, does not lend itself naturally to being treated as truth of poetry or symbol. As the Bishop of Ely says, "the Apostles' Creed is not primarily,

¹ "When I say 'He descended into hell,' and also when in a more general sense I say 'He ascended into heaven, and sitteth, etc.,' I confess to the use of metaphor in a historical statement, because the historical statement carries me outside the world of present possible experience, and symbolical language is the only language that I can use." (*The Basis of Anglican Fellowship*, p. 20.)

like the Nicene Creed, theological." It is largely, and especially in its second and longest division, a clear summary statement of what purport to be historical facts, already narrated at fuller length in the Gospels.

5. It is pre-eminently a moral issue which is at stake, as the late Professor Henry Sidgwick made clear in his articles on "The Ethics of Religious Conformity" and "Clerical Veracity."¹ In the twenty odd years that have passed since he wrote them, the situation has developed fast, and I do not question that, if he could rewrite them now, he would adopt a less stringent attitude in many particulars; and he would almost certainly recognise that he had treated Dr. Rashdall's reply to his first article unhandsomely and even harshly. But, where he was writing without any possible reference to Dr. Rashdall (*i.e.* in the first article, before Dr. Rashdall had intervened in the discussion), I feel that Professor Sidgwick was right in emphasising "the damage done to moral habits, and the offence given to moral sentiments," by the growing practice of making an equivocal assent to statements

¹ The articles are to be found in *Practical Ethics*, 1898. The first article appeared in the *International Journal of Ethics* for April, 1896, and Dr. Rashdall's reply to that article was in the same journal for January, 1897.

which have a plain natural meaning.¹ When the question was of an *ex animo* assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles, Bishop Edmund Law asserted that the Church was hazarding the peace and the probity of its members by leading them into the labyrinths of casuistry; “more especially when it is considered, that conscience, once strained, seldom contracts again to its first dimensions.”²

¹ Cp. T. H. Green, *Two Lay Sermons*, p. 99: “Inability to adopt the creeds of Christendom in their natural sense—and in any other sense they are best left alone—need not disqualify us from using its prayers. A creed is meant to serve either as an article of agreement with other men, or as a basis of theological argument; and from each point of view there are objections to using its words in any other meaning than that which they are ordinarily understood to bear. But in prayer we need not ask whether our words are such as would be understood by others in the same sense as by us, or whether they convey a correct theological conception. They are not meant to be heard of men.”

² *Op. cit.* p. 22.

SINCERITY AND TRUTH

A SERMON

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SINCERITY AND TRUTH

A sermon preached in Westminster Abbey on the First Sunday, after Easter, April 27th, 1919.

Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Cor. v. 8.

THESE words belong to a letter probably written near the time of Passover, and would be readily understood by St. Paul's first readers to refer to the scrupulous care with which every Jew, as the Feast approached, would search his house with candle, "prying into every mouse-hole and cranny," that he might remove the smallest trace of the bitter leaven. The Apostle, with his happy gift of spiritualising outward ordinance, bids his readers make ready for the perpetual Christian Passover by purging out from their midst every trace of bitterness and corruption. Let them make a clean sweep of the old leaven, corrupt and corrupting, and so let them keep

festival "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." For the Christian society, free from the leaven of corruption, must be as "a new lump," pure itself, and therefore able to purify the world. No care can be too great: "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"—it is a proverbial saying St. Paul has already used in writing to the Galatians. ~~A little~~ Any tolerated evil will quickly infect the whole community, and invalidate its Christian witness to the world. He was not speaking in the air: already in the preceding verses he had criticised the Corinthians' laxity in condoning sexual evil. If they countenanced such evil in their own community, their protest against the evil that was in the world would be discounted by their evident insincerity.]

[St. Paul was one who could afford to press the point, because he was himself the sincerest of men. As he tells these same converts in another letter, if there is one claim that he can make for himself and his fellow-workers, it is "the testimony of our conscience that in holiness and godly sincerity . . . we behaved ourselves in the world, and especially towards

you.” Unlike the many who corrupt the word of God, he can claim that “like a man of sincerity, like a man of God, I speak the word in Christ, as in the sight of God.” “~~Our word towards you is not yes and no.~~” John Wesley’s terse comment on ^{the} ~~our~~ text is : “Sincerity and truth are put here for the whole of true inward religion” ; and if the reference is thought to be too large, we must allow that, where sincerity and truth are wanting in religion, no virtues can atone for their absence ; where they are present, mistakes of every other kind are forgivable.]

It is not only in religion that sincerity is a first requisite, and indispensable. Sincerity and truth are the very foundation of all enduring art and literature. “The Poet,” says Wordsworth in his famous preface, “rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge ; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science.” There must be truth in the realm of thought as well as in the realm of action ; insincerity is a moral as well as an intellectual defect in either, a defect which

vitiates both thought and action. Sincerity is a prime commendation of whatever is offered to us by artist and poet.

“Bright is the ring of words,
When the right man rings them.”¹

Sincerity and truth are, no less, the first demand that can be made of the preacher. No eloquence or learning or aptness to discern popular feeling can make good their absence, or even the suspicion in the mind of the hearer of their absence. The disfavour which has overtaken ornate eloquence is wholesome; it was not favourable to sincerity. It may be claimed that the pulpit has gained in sincerity by discarding much of the language of ornament and convention. Has it also gained in veracity? For truth-telling is something more than that the preacher should be sincere, that is, should say what he sincerely believes to be true; it requires also that he be deeply concerned to discover, to the best of his ability and opportunity, what is true. Has he anything like the passion for truth which characterises the leaders of thought in scientific and other learning? For in our times

¹ R. L. Stevenson, *Songs of Travel*, No. xiv.

there is no mistaking the fact that there is a new standard of truth, a new reverence for truth, resulting from the widespread influence of scientific thought on every other province of human inquiry. Does the Christian preacher commonly recognise the strength and the exacting demands of that new spirit, and its essential rightness ?

[It is sometimes said that what the laity want is definite teaching ; but perhaps there is something they want even more, and that is truth ;¹ and truth in the things of the spirit is never adequately expressed in definition. The mediaeval schoolmen were right in saying that Definition is Negation ; it is more successful in ruling out than in including. A definition is no sooner made than it disappoints, and is seen to miss something, even

¹ Cp. B. H. Streeter, *Restatement and Reunion*, ch. ii.

Cp. also the words of the Headmaster of Sherborne : " So far from the crying need of our religious teaching being definiteness and dogma, it is the living and illimitable energy of study, the ardent passion for ever more and more progress towards the truth, which alone can command the respect and interest of the growing minds and wills of our boys and girls, young women and young men. . . . When they ask for the bread of sincerity and truth, are we to give them the stones of second-hand and conventional formulae ? " (Nowell Smith, "*Where is your Faith ?*" pp. 59, 60).

the thing most desired. It is but an approximation. ~~An approximation is worth having,~~ but it must be known for what it is, and not ~~mistaken~~ for the truth itself. "We are driven," exclaims St. Hilary pathetically, "to strain our weak human language, in the utterance of things beyond its scope, . . . to climb where we cannot reach, to speak what we cannot utter." "We have no celestial language." But prophet and psalmist, poet and musician, can carry us further into the heart of spiritual truth than definitions can ever do. Not without good reason has poetry been called the most philosophic of all writings: "its object is truth, not individual and local, but general and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony."¹ The higher ranges of religious truth are thus apprehended, not by the speculative intellect alone, but by the spirit of a man that is in him.

But in the lower ranges of religious truth, where external testimony is relevant, in matters that are "individual and local," here,

¹ Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800.

at any rate, there is required the pure desire to reach exact truth, and a willingness to exercise the necessary discipline of scientific method and detached mind. Questions of history, even of the most sacred history, can only be investigated by the same strict method as is approved in all other modern studies. It requires a dispassionate determination to arrive as near as we can to truth, "though it were to our own hindrance," though it should require us to revise, or even to abandon, what we have once taught or been taught. Is the Christian Church thus free to revise its past findings, or is it, in this vital matter of truth-seeking, behind the best conscience of our day? To fail here is to fail irreparably. For it has been truly said: "There is no surer road to a state of alienation from what is best in modern life, and to the forfeiture of good men's confidence, than that of a careless handling of the standard of truth."¹ How are we to explain the fact, for fact it unhappily is, that the standard of veracity is lower in religious writing and speaking, than in other departments of human inquiry? Is it that

¹ Dr. L. P. Jacks, *Hibbert Journal*, Oct. 1906.

religious teachers are encouraged to suppose that tradition has handed down the truth which matters, so that, at most, all that is required of them is to interpret what they have received? The old Master of Balliol, in speaking of Pascal's keen love of truth, adds the dry comment—"not generally deemed the virtue of a saint." And yet, as Jowett wrote on another occasion, "That is a maimed soul which loves goodness and has no love of truth, or which loves truth and has no love of goodness." The desire for truth is a spiritual aspiration for one of the ultimate values of life; and in the completely spiritual man "all things belonging to the spirit" should "live and grow."

There is a further ^{point} ~~reason~~, which I cannot neglect to mention in spite of its delicacy, why the veracity of Christian teachers is under a very natural suspicion. Religious thought has undergone more change in the last two generations than probably ever before in Christian history, even if we include the era of the Reformation; yet the formularies of the Church remain unchanged. It becomes increasingly difficult and unnatural to express

our religion within the old forms. Some theologians, indeed, think it sufficient that as wide an interpretation as language will permit should be allowed to the words of ancient formulae. ~~I do not question for a moment~~ the personal honesty of those who adopt what is variously described as a symbolical or figurative or metaphorical interpretation of articles of the historical creeds, but I cannot think that any permanent solution lies that way.¹ Casuistry, even the most honest and the most necessary, has its very real perils. As Socrates says to Crito, "To use words in an improper sense is not only a bad thing in itself, but it generates a bad habit in the soul." To use words in a non-natural sense may be a legitimate temporary expedient, especially if it is done with open explanation and with the at least tacit approval of authority or of common understanding, but it cannot give assurance either to those who believe that the cause of Christianity is bound up with the retention of former statements of orthodoxy, or to those who believe that the

see p 152

¹ I leave the words as I preached them, but the subject has been already more fully discussed, *supra*, pp. 149-154.

Church of Christ is called to follow the guidance of the Spirit into new truth. "Thus far and no further" is a counsel of timidity which adventurous souls will always refuse; they must follow the Logos, wherever it leads. If they are humble-minded, they will never lightly break with the inherited experience and devotions of the saints, but neither will they regard the definitions of the past as binding for all time. If it is indeed the Spirit of Truth that guides the minds of men through the ages, "his later lessons shall transcend his earlier."¹ The Church of the Spirit cannot afford, for very shame, to be more timorous in the search for truth than those who seek truth without conscious relation to the Divine Spirit.

Here the courage of the Church has faltered. But many of her devoted sons regard this faltering as faithlessness. One of them, taken from us by war, when we looked for so much more from him, has sorrowfully recorded :—

"The Church has feared the freedom of the Spirit because the Spirit is creative and cannot be confined within the limits of past expression and past order. . . .

¹ Bishop Thirlwall.

In conduct she has taught men to prefer obedience to moral freedom, in knowledge to prefer dogma to truth, and in social order to reverence the authority of the past rather than that of the future. . . . She has inspired prejudice as much as sincerity.”¹

Sincerity and truth : there is no true service of God, in which these are made needlessly difficult of attainment. The search for truth is itself a worship of God, the love of truth is the love of that which is in God. It is told of the brave and virtuous opponent of the Jesuits, Cornelius Jansen, that when he was asked which of the divine attributes most impressed him, he replied Truth. “ He meditated continually on this theme,” says Sainte-Beuve, “ he sought truth night and day in his studies ; and sometimes, in his rare moments of relaxation, while walking in his garden, he was heard crying aloud, with eyes lifted to heaven, and a deep sigh escaping from his heart—O Truth, O Truth ! ”

It is not to the forms of truth that we should cling beyond their time of usefulness, but to their essence as it is ever more adequately discerned. Else we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us ; nor will men

¹ A. C. Turner in *Concerning Prayer*, p. 434.

look to us for truth, if we set tradition before truth, the form before the essence.

“ Truth fails not ; but her outward forms that bear
The longest date do melt like frosty rime,
That in the morning whitened hill and plain
And is no more ; drop like the tower sublime
Of yesterday, which royally did wear
His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain
Some casual shout that broke the silent air,
Or the unimaginable touch of Time.” ¹

¹ Wordsworth, sonnet *Mutability*.

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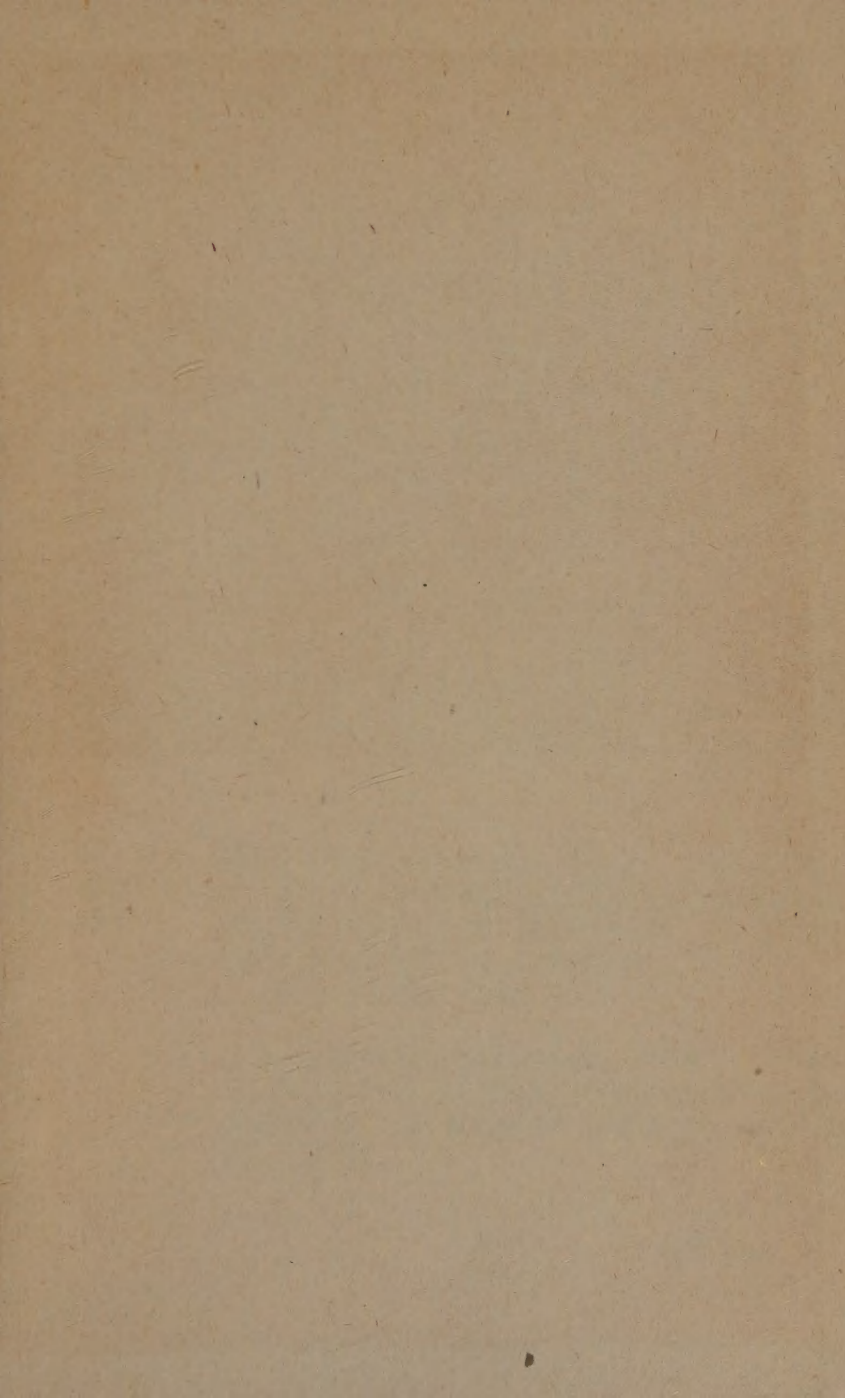
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